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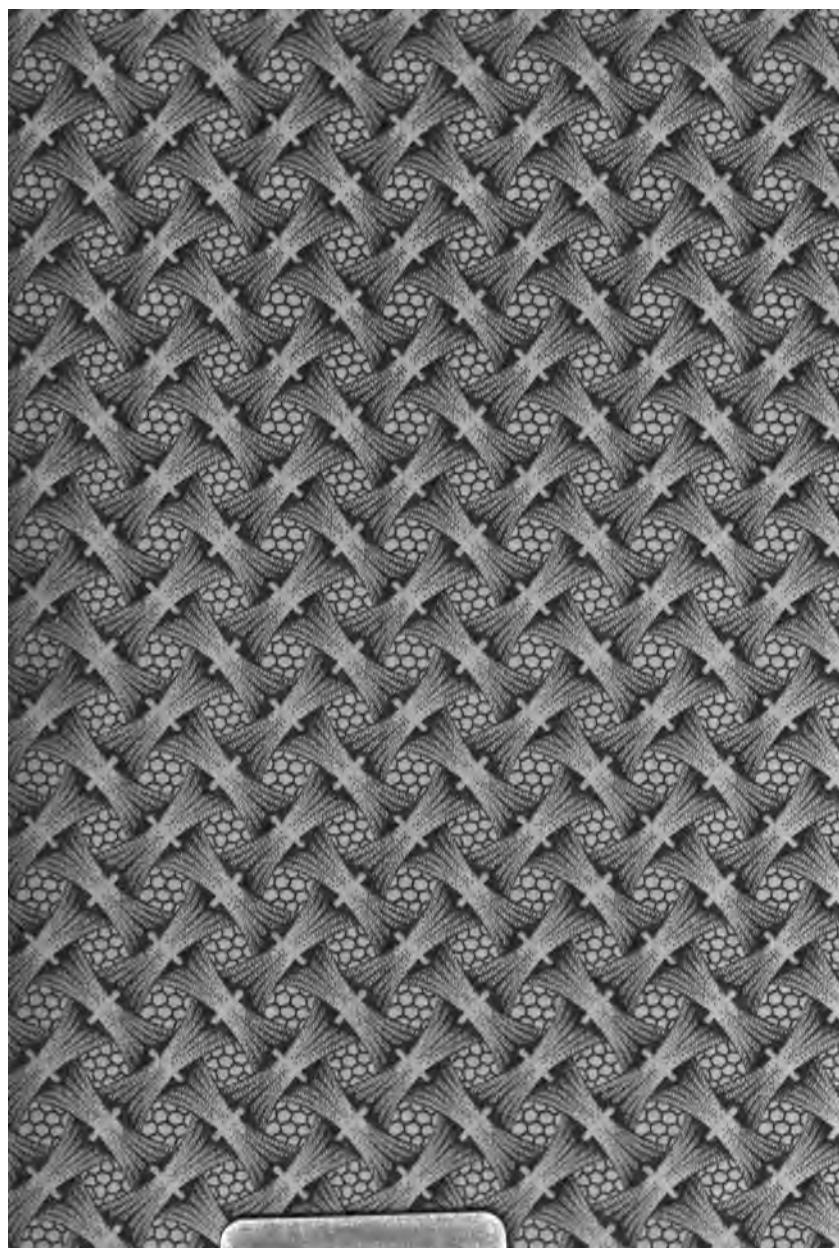
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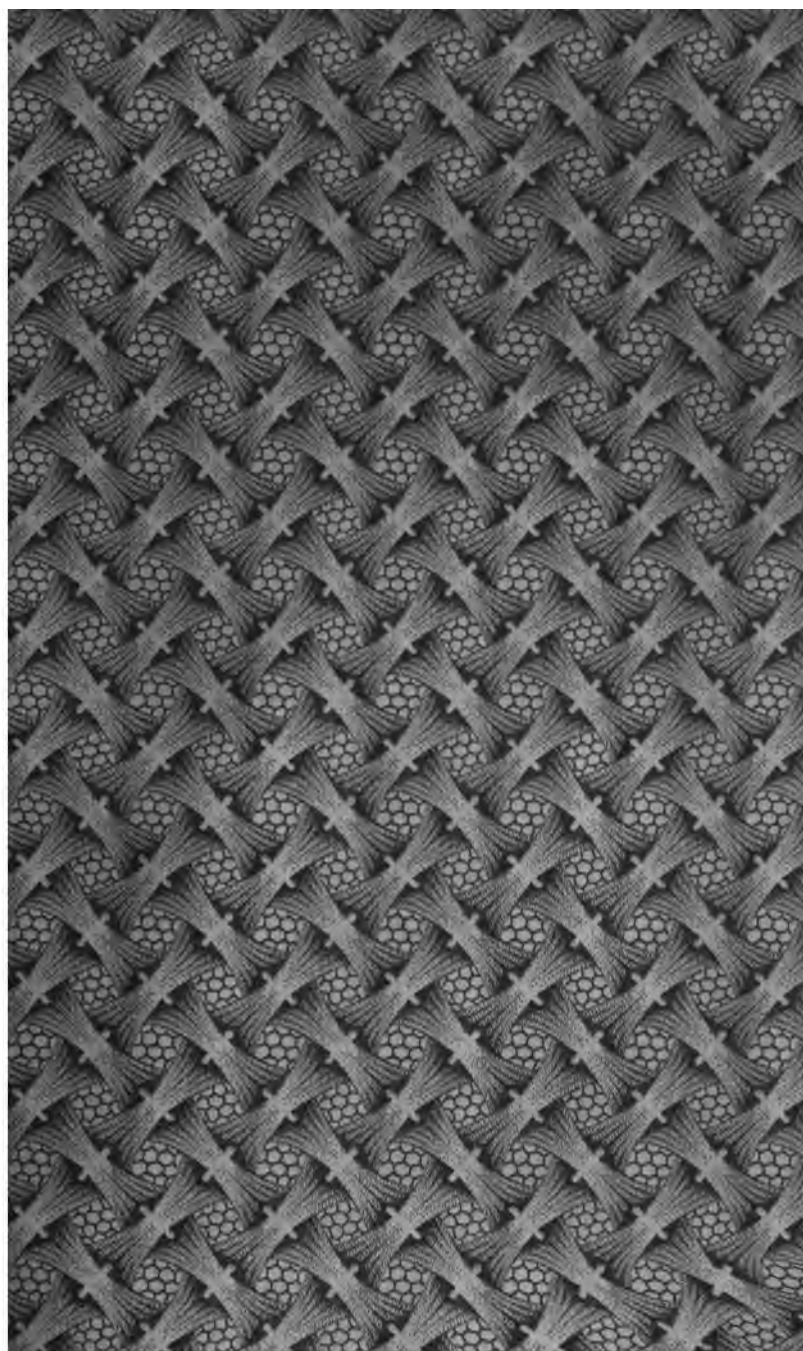
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HIS FIRST LOVE AND HIS LAST.

A Story with Two Heroes.

BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. Roses	1
II. Lucy	23
III. Selwood Castle	48
IV. Moreton Park	67
V. An Artist and his Art	86
VI. Silenced, not Convinced	106
VII. A Summer Afternoon	129
VIII. Sunset and Sunrise	159
Conclusion	178



HIS FIRST LOVE AND HIS LAST:

A STORY WITH TWO HEROES.

CHAPTER I.

ROSES.

She's tall and straight as a poplar tree,
Her cheeks are red as a rose ;
She looks like a lady of high degree
When drest in her Sunday clothes.

OLD SONG.

“**W**HAT magnificent roses !” exclaimed Beatrice Sarmiento, leaning forward in the carriage as she spoke, in order to obtain a nearer view of the flowers.

She was a very pretty girl, tall and slight, with black hair and grey eyes, and a pale, clear complexion, which became suffused with scarlet whenever she grew at all animated, the delicate hue corresponding exactly with the colour of her well-cut lips. Her father was a Portuguese, but her mother was a connection of Mrs. Moreton, the lady in whose carriage she was now seated, and with whom, both her parents being dead, she had come to live, for the present at any rate. She had been received with the utmost cordiality by her aunt (as she always called Mrs. Moreton), not so much for her own sake as for that of the not inconsiderable fortune of which she had the absolute disposal, and which Mrs. Moreton hoped to

secure for her only son, Perceval, it being the darling wish of her heart that he should marry Beatrice, although hitherto he had not shown the slightest disposition to gratify his mother in this respect. And certainly she was somewhat inconsistent in expecting that he would do so; she had spoiled him in the most foolish manner, especially since his father's death, and had spared no pains to satisfy his every caprice and indulge his every whim. These three had come down from London to spend Whitsuntide at Moreton Park, and were driving over to attend the afternoon service at Selwood Church, about eight or nine miles off; the fourth seat in the carriage being occupied by an artist, American by birth, though long settled in Eng-

land, and a great friend of Perceval Moreton's, who himself handled the brush with no mean skill.

The roses which excited Beatrice's admiration, and elicited from her the remark with which our chapter opens, had been skilfully woven together so as to form a wreath, and were in the hand of a young girl whose steps were evidently directed to the same church towards which the carriage from Moreton Park was proceeding.

"Is that Lucy Brailsford who is carrying the flowers?" asked Perceval; then, having received an affirmative answer, "How good-looking she is!" he continued, "such beautiful eyes! She is a great deal better worth one's attention than the wreath she happens to have in her

hand. Don't you think so, Furley?" he added, appealing to a somewhat eccentric-looking individual who was seated beside him.

"I really did not specially notice her," was the reply. "I was thinking of the sketches you promised I should take while I am staying with you!"

"There is no doubt she *is* very handsome for a person in her class of life," remarked Mrs. Moreton.

"In her class of life! How you do talk, mother!" interrupted Perceval, "as if beauty were not a gift equally distributed among all classes."

"I must be permitted to differ from you, if indeed such boldness can be pardoned," said the artist, with some little

irony. "I have always found much more beauty in the upper and lower classes than in the middle, which, as a rule, comes off very badly in this respect."

"And this is just the class to which Lucy belongs! That was an unlucky remark of yours, Furley," said Moreton, laughing.

His mother came to the rescue of her guest.

"It all depends how the middle class is defined. The line may be drawn in such very different places, and people like Lucy may be assigned to the upper half of the lower or the lower half of the middle accordingly."

"It seems quite a study to give people their proper places now-a-days," said Bea-

trice, "just as it must have been for Dante to arrange the inhabitants of the unseen world !"

"It is a subject on which no two people can be found to think alike," resumed Mrs. Moreton. "I only wish the lines were drawn more sharply, and the definitions were more distinct, as they used to be when I was a girl; one class did not tread on the heels of another as is the case in the present day. However, Lucy's father was a builder, I believe—at least, he was brought up for one, but somehow he got hold of money enough to enable him to live in idleness, so now you must form an opinion for yourself, Mr. Furley," she added, smiling.

All further discussion became impossible,

for the carriage drew up at the gate of Selwood churchyard, and its occupants at once prepared to alight.

Lucy Brailsford had arrived before them, having come across the fields by a short cut while they were driving round the road. A somewhat sickly-looking, middle-aged man had hold of her arm with one of his hands, while with the other he leant upon the stick which served him for a further assistance in walking. No one could have called him handsome, yet every one looked twice at his pale, refined face, which bore evident marks of suffering, either bodily or mental, perhaps both, and excited an involuntary feeling of sympathy and compassion. He had lost one leg, but the practice of more than twenty

years enabled him to manage the wooden substitute with marvellous skill, though his progress was necessarily somewhat slow.

Lucy accommodated her pace to his in a manner that was very charming, especially as she was totally unconscious of the fact that his worn countenance and slightly bent figure set off her resplendent youth and beauty to perfection, and afforded the very contrast best calculated to attract attention to her shapely proportions, and air of absolute health and strength.

They were a striking-looking couple certainly; a picture strangely framed in the commonplace, every-day surroundings of the village churchyard as they pro-

ceeded along the path which led to the principal entrance of the church. About half-way they paused, and, stepping on to the grass, stood for two or three moments beside a grave, distinguished from those around by a stone cross at its head. Upon this grave Lucy laid the fragrant wreath of roses which had attracted Beatrice's attention. Her companion watched her intently, while his eyes filled with tears; then he reverently lifted his hat, and the pair, turning away, resumed their interrupted progress to the church. It is not wonderful that they should have awakened Horace Furley's curiosity, nor that he should ask Mrs. Moreton who they were, as he walked beside that lady from the carriage to the church. She had time to

give him but scanty information, for the beautiful peal of bells had ceased ringing out from the tower some minutes before, and chiming in had already begun, constituting an appeal responded to by the groups of men and boys lingering round the door. Such groups invariably do thus linger in country places, until the very last moment, prepared to avail themselves of the earliest possible instant when they can with decency hold themselves released from their religious duties, in order to hasten back into the open air and resume their reluctantly suspended conversations with their friends and fellow-parishioners.

Selwood Church is always very full on Sunday afternoons in the summer; so many people drive or walk over there from

the neighbouring town of Fairport, attracted alike by the beauty of its natural surroundings and by the charm of the choral service to be listened to within its walls. It is an ideal village church in every way; no wonder that it was fuller even than usual on this golden afternoon early in June, when the perfumed breath of the stately limes which shelter it was filling the air, and the summer flowers, blossoming in profusion above the neatly kept graves, made the churchyard look like a garden, and seemed to rob the idea of death of half its horror, if only one could make up one's mind to leave so beautiful a world! For beautiful it was, beyond the gates of the churchyard as well as within them, if one looked at the

picturesque little village, half asleep in the glowing sunshine, with corn-fields and rich pastures and green woods stretching far away behind it to the background of blue hills in the distance ; or else, turning one's eyes in another direction, one might prefer to gaze seaward, and enjoy a view of the grey towers of the half-ruined castle, with the pretty bright town of Fairport about two miles beyond, and then the azure sea.

“Is it not an enchanting day?” Beatrice asked Horace Furley, as the two slowly sauntered down the path after the service was over, Mrs. Moreton and Percival being meanwhile engrossed in talking to some acquaintances.

“Is it not an enchanting place?” he responded ; “but perhaps you have grown

so accustomed to it as scarcely to appreciate it as it deserves."

"We don't drive over very often," she said, "and then it does not always look like this; it is seen at its very best to-day."

"No doubt it is," answered the artist rather absently, for his thoughts had already wandered to his projected sketches, so that Beatrice felt relieved when the others joined them at the gate. The sermon had been shorter than usual, and the carriage had not come up yet, but it was soon descried moving rapidly across the green, and in a few moments more the whole party were embarked upon the homeward drive.

"Well, Mr. Furley, I hope you admire

our favourite church. We never forgive any one who doesn't, so you are warned beforehand not to express your opinions too freely if they happen to differ from ours," said Mrs. Moreton, as they rolled smoothly along.

"It is a question on which there could not be two opinions," replied her guest with a bow; "and, even if there were, I should not have courage to own to a contrary one when such a penalty is attached to the avowal!"

"How the new curate does stammer!" said Perceval. "I thought he never would get through the first lesson. He made endless mistakes, too, in pronouncing the proper names, but that was partly because he was so busy looking over at Beatrice

whenever he possibly could. You didn't notice it, though," he continued, nodding playfully at her ; "you were too fast asleep in the corner of the pew !"

Beatrice was slow of tongue, and never had a repartee ready, so she could only colour deeply, and make some commonplace remark about the long drive and her own heavy eyelids.

Mrs. Moreton exceedingly disliked Perceval's last speech ; it grated upon her in two ways ; first, because she considered its tone to be flippant, if not actually irreverent ; and secondly, because she was always annoyed to hear her son say anything implying that he regarded Beatrice as being a prize as yet undisposed of. So she hastened to avert, as she thought,

further danger by completely changing the subject.

“ You were asking me about Lucy Brailsford and Robert Oldham,” she said, addressing herself to Horace Furley. “ I was obliged to cut you rather short I am afraid. I should like you to have spoken to them, but the De Bracys seized upon Perceval and me the moment we got outside the church door, and before we could free ourselves the two individuals in whom you take so much interest were nowhere to be seen. Lady de Bracy is the most inveterate gossip I ever knew ! ”

“ They are not father and daughter then ? ” inquired Horace.

“ Oh, no ! ” responded Mrs. Moreton, “ they are no relatives, though Lucy always

calls Oldham 'uncle,' I believe. He has brought her up ever since she was three or four years old; she is about seventeen or eighteen now, and a most well-conducted girl, by all accounts. They are both superior to their station in many ways, and yet not in the least disagreeable, for they are quite simple, and apparently unconscious of their own superiority."

"Lucy can't be unconscious of her own good looks," remarked Perceval. "You ought to paint her, Furley!"

"I have almost given up attempting portraits," replied the artist. "I succeed so much better with landscapes every one tells me, and I like painting them much better too!"

"I wonder at you, Furley, I do in-

deed!" said Perceval, smiling. "Well, then, if you do not care to paint Lucy, you shall paint her home. She and her uncle live in the old castle, but perhaps my mother has already told you this?" he added inquiringly.

"On the contrary, I was just going to ask where they lived," was the reply.

"Robert Oldham is the castle keeper," said Mrs. Moreton. "Though it is a ruin, part of it has been fitted up as a dwelling-house, and there is a lovely little garden, out of which those roses must have come. A small salary is paid him for taking care of the place, and showing it to strangers. He has been there a long while, nearly twenty years I should think, if not quite; Perceval was a little child at the time he

first came. The post was given him after he met with the accident which made him a cripple. It was a sad story altogether. He was engaged to Lucy's mother, who jilted him, and died in a few years, leaving the child to his care. I don't know what had become of her husband, and, to tell the truth, I have half forgotten the whole story, as we were scarcely ever at Moreton Park at that time, and only went there on a visit now and then, as my husband's father was still living. We will drive you over to Selwood Castle to-morrow if you like; we haven't been there since last summer, have we, Beatrice?"

"No, Aunt," she replied; "at least I have never been since I rode there with Perceval one day in August. Let me ride

over with you to-morrow," she added, with more animation than she had hitherto displayed ; " I should like it so much."

" Some other day I shall be delighted," her cousin answered, " but this time I think Mr. Furley and I had better go by ourselves. He is going to sketch, you know, and we couldn't keep you waiting about."

Beatrice would fain have said that she would be very willing to wait, but she remained silent.

" Beatrice and I will claim your company another time, Mr. Furley," said Mrs. Moreton. " There is a great deal for you to see, and we expect you to make this part of the country quite famous you know."

" Don't bring excursionists and cockney

tourists down on us though," said Perceval ; then, after a moment's pause, "How long shall you want for your sketching ?" he inquired, somewhat abruptly.

Having received the desired answer, he remained almost silent for the remainder of the drive, leaving the other three occupants of the carriage to converse among themselves. He was busy maturing a scheme he had in his head, concerning which he deemed it prudent to preserve silence, at least for the present. We will now, however, leave the whole party to proceed on their way back to Moreton Park, while we make our readers more fully acquainted with the past history of Robert and Lucy.



CHAPTER II.

LUCY.

The storm that rends the wintry sky
No more disturbs her calm repose
Than summer evening's latest sigh
That shuts the rose.

HEBER.

NEARLY twenty years before, another Lucy had haunted the dreams of Robert Oldham, and engrossed his waking thoughts. He was an orphan, and had been apprenticed very young to a builder in Fairport. Clever, active, and intelligent, he soon got on, so that, when his master died, he became the right hand of the widow, who with his help carried on the business most successfully. Her pretty daughter Lucy

smiled on him, and indeed Robert and she were engaged the day he was twenty-one. The young builder seemed to have the world at his feet, for what was there a man in his class could reasonably desire that he did not possess? Nor was he at all disposed to underrate his own good fortune, or be ungrateful for it.

“I have nothing left to wish for, Lucy,” he said to his betrothed, as they were strolling on the sands in the evening of the day on which she had promised to join her lot to his. “What a charming place this world is! I don’t see how we can ever be happier than we are now, even when we are married!”

“If a fairy were to appear to me now,” rejoined Lucy, “and offer to fulfil three

wishes for me, I should answer that I could form none, and I should beg the obliging fairy to go to some one less fortunate instead, for it would be selfish to spend the wishes on things that would do me no real good."

And, as they wandered on beneath the golden August moon, they built the stateliest castles in the air, and made the most attractive plans for the years to come, while the wavelets rippled at their feet and the stars came out one by one. *Tout sommet attire la foudre*, and if Robert and Lucy had been somewhat older, and had had rather more experience of the disappointments and disenchantments of life, their tone would have been less confident; they would have known that their dream

of existence could not be realized, and felt that, in some respect or other, a rude awakening must infallibly be in store for them. In fact, the terms on which life was really offered them were as different as possible from those they were proposing to themselves, and later on they found it no easy thing to close with so hard a bargain. As it was, however, their joyous confidence never for a moment forsook them, and in the most exultant mood they at length turned their steps in the direction of the little town, and entered the wood which grew between it and the sea.

Perhaps the silence and gloom, and the dark shadows of the trees, sobered their high spirits; at any rate, their talk became more matter-of-fact and practical, so

that Lucy remembered to tell Robert an important piece of news, hitherto forgotten.

“Mr. Brailsford is coming at last,” she said ; “he has written to say he will be here to-morrow. Are you not very glad ? We are, and I am especially, for now you will not be so taken up with accounts in the evening, and will have more time to come out with me. You must make him do whatever you don’t care about doing.”

“That’s all very well,” rejoined Robert, “but he will probably take a different view of the matter.”

“He is to be quite under you ; my mother was saying so this evening just before I came out.”

“We shall see,” interrupted Robert, a

little impatiently; "I daresay we shall get on well enough together. Only you mustn't like him better than me," he added, changing his tone to one of playfulness.

"I won't promise till I have seen him," she answered, as she opened the garden gate and ran into the house, pausing a moment to kiss her hand to her lover before she finally disappeared.

"Lucy's love of joking sometimes carries her too far," he soliloquised, as he proceeded to his lodgings. "I wish she wouldn't say such things, though I know she does not mean them. Perhaps it would have been better to go on as we are, at least for the present. One never knows what changes of one kind or other the coming of a stranger may bring about."

Such thoughts as these formed the first tiny cloud in the heaven of Robert's felicity. Who could have foreseen how rapidly it would spread, how darkly it would lower, how suddenly it would fall, how utterly it would devastate all the smiling landscape of his hopes!

Every one liked John Brailsford, and before he had been many weeks in Fairport he had become an universal favourite, for he was as pleasing as he was worthless.

Possessing a superficial refinement which concealed to a great extent the innate coarseness of his nature, and a superficial cleverness which enabled him successfully to imitate the manners of those above him, with whom he was frequently, in the ordinary course of his business, brought into

contact, he was considered in the small circle of Lucy's friends to be a most superior person, and the unanimous vote of that limited public soon pronounced him to rank far above Oldham in the social scale, all the more because Brailsford was better-looking and better off than the latter. And what did Lucy herself think? Did she, like the rest, slight the true gold, allured by the bright glitter of the false? Or did she remain loyal to the faithful heart which was so entirely her own? Alas! she was not worthy of its devotion, and the brilliant stranger soon attracted her roving fancy, especially as he flattered her in a way Robert never had done.

"It is so much nicer *making* friends than *being* friends," she would say to herself, in

answer to the occasional reproaches of her conscience, "and I *do* like a little change ! It is so stupid never to go out with any one but Robert ; I shall see quite enough of him when we are married !"

Oldham had from the very first felt for Brailsford one of those instinctive aversions which never deceive as to the object of them, and jealousy soon came to be added to dislike when he saw the increasing influence the new-comer exercised over his own betrothed bride. He struggled hard with himself, he strove to repel his suspicions and to trust Lucy.

"Where there is love there must be confidence," he would repeat to himself.

But Brailsford saw how greatly it would be for his advantage to marry Lucy, and

take possession of that share of the business destined for her future husband, and he resolved she should be his wife, not because he loved her, but because he loved himself and his own interest. His mean, low, character could not appreciate the wrong he was doing to Oldham ; his selfish nature could not feel for the wound he was inflicting on the affectionate heart of his rival, whom he hated merely because he saw in him an obstacle to his own advancement, an obstacle, moreover, which he had determined to remove as soon as possible.

Exactly a year after he first came to Fairport the opportunity he was waiting for presented itself. He happened to be engaged in superintending the rebuilding

of a house a mile or two out of Fairport, and one evening he lingered late on the scene of his labours, after the workmen had all gone home, a most unusual proceeding on his part, for he loved idleness, and regarded work only as a means of getting money wherewith to purchase such enjoyments as he most delighted in, instead of considering it a thing to be done well in itself.

It was just such a cloudless evening as the one on which Robert and Lucy had first wandered as engaged lovers on the sandy beach, beneath the glowing harvest moon. The same moon was looking down on Brailsford now. Does it not blush for what it sees him do? Is there not an expression of reproach on its countenance, if

he could only read it there ? How different might the course of two human lives have been, if only some warning voice had scared him away before his purpose was accomplished ! But no such sound was heard as he lingered about the scaffolding, and in due time he set off upon his homeward path.

“What can have kept master out till now ?” exclaimed one of two workmen whom he chanced to meet. What *had* kept him, indeed !

The next morning, with more friendliness of manner than usual, he requested Oldham to pay a visit of inspection to the works in progress for re-erecting the mansion, and give his opinion on one or two doubtful points. Robert refrained

from expressing the surprise he felt at the unexpected request. He did not like to show how reluctant he was to comply with it ; he made two or three objections which the other over-ruled with an ingenuity worthy of a better cause ; and the end of the matter was, that the two young men set out together.

Robert was sure-footed, as a rule ; he knew this, and confidence in his own powers now and then betrayed him into being venturesome, almost foolhardy, though hitherto he had never met with any serious accident. His good fortune, however, deserted him on the present occasion ; a loose board gave way under his foot, he fell from the scaffolding, and was carried home to all appearance lifeless.

One leg had to be amputated without delay, and other grievous injuries kept him prisoner to a sick bed the whole winter, thus leaving the field clear for Brailsford.

Lucy tried to be faithful to Robert ; she was very sorry for his misfortune, and really fond of him in her way, but the force of circumstances proved too much for her, especially as everything combined to urge her in the direction in which she all the while felt reluctant to go. She was not one of those who know how to row against wind and tide, and so, after a short resistance, she allowed herself to drift down the stream which was carrying her away from Robert.

About Christmas her mother died, and the business was soon after sold, in com-

pliance with a strange whim of Brailsford's, who appeared bent on leaving Fairport and its neighbourhood; why, Lucy could not imagine, and, happily for her, never knew. She insisted that a small sum should be invested for Robert's benefit.

"He made the business what it is, John," she said, "and it is only the barest justice not to leave him penniless, now that the doctors say he will never be able to earn much again."

So Brailsford, to whom she was now engaged, consented, fearing to lose all if he strove to grasp too much, and remembering that the large sum realized by the sale of the business belonged entirely to Lucy until her marriage. In fact, it was

large enough to put the climax to his wishes, for the income it afforded would, when added to a small one which he had of his own, enable him to live without doing anything to earn his bread. And thus it came to pass that he and Lucy were married about the beginning of May, and went to live at Ashley, a town half-way between Fairport and London.

The winter of Robert Oldham's life set in just when the literal spring was at its loveliest all around him; no one, surely, can be found to blame him for wishing, over and over again, that he had not survived his cruel fall. To a less courageous soul the idea of self-destruction would have been an obvious one, for many are the craven hearts which scheme to run

away when the battle of life grows hot, instead of standing their ground firmly, and resolving to fight bravely until the end shall come, and the reward of their patient valour be received.

Crippled, weakened in health, deprived of occupation, robbed of his affianced wife, and all this at twenty-two, his lot was a hard one indeed, and excited much sympathy in Fairport and its neighbourhood. Several of the principal inhabitants of the town exerted themselves in his behalf, and procured for him the home at Selwood Castle, where we first found him.

Four quiet uneventful years passed over him there, and as they glided imperceptibly away, his history might have been summed up in a few words :—

I learned at last contentment with my lot,
And though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot.

On the morning of his twenty-sixth birthday he was at work in his garden as usual, when the old postman paused at the gate, and put a letter into his hand. This was in itself a noteworthy event, for Robert's correspondents were so few that his first thought as he glanced at the envelope was: "Who can be writing to me?" In a moment more he recognised Lucy's hand, and became absorbed in the sad tale she told him.

"You will wonder that I venture to address you," so ran the letter, "and perhaps I ought not to do so, but I could not be more ashamed than I am of the way I behaved to you, nor could I regret my

conduct more bitterly than I do. I have been most severely punished, and now my husband has concluded his course of cruelty by going off to America, leaving me and my little girl almost penniless. He has spent nearly all our money, and now he is suspected of forging a cheque; need I say more to show how much I have suffered? Forgive me, and come and see me before I die. I am better to-day, or I could not write even these few lines, but the doctor has just told me I cannot live many weeks, and I may die at any time.

“Your humble and penitent,

“LUCY.”

By the middle of the same day Robert had made arrangements for a brief absence,

and was on his way to the railway station. He had never left Selwood since he first took up his abode there four years ago, and he had, therefore, no difficulty in obtaining a holiday.

How slowly the train seemed to move along! How interminable appeared the pauses at the various stations!

“She may be dead before I can get to her,” he kept repeating to himself; “if only I can see her again alive!”

This wish was not denied. When he knocked at the door of the shabby little house, in which she was lodging, and asked for Mrs. Brailsford, the landlady showed him into an old-fashioned parlour, and asked him to wait while she informed the invalid of his arrival.

In a few moments he was ushered into Lucy's presence; she was dressed and sitting up, but sickness and misery had ravaged her beauty to a greater extent than his imagination had been able to depict; he could not speak a single word of greeting, he could only take her hand, and seat himself beside her, looking at her with an expression of the most intense affection, the most tender sympathy, while his eyes slowly filled with the tears he was struggling to repress.

"I am more changed than you expected, am I not?" Lucy asked, for she was much the calmer of the two. "How kind of you to come, and to come so soon; I really begin to hope you have forgiven me," she continued, timidly, reassured by the ex-

pression of his eyes, and venturing gently to stroke the hand in which Robert had clasped one of hers.

It was more than he could bear.

“Forgive you,” he cried, “forgive you ! I do not think I could ever find that a very difficult task. I had forgiven you before you asked me, and now I have forgotten also.”

“I loved you best all the while ; I did, indeed, Robert,” said Lucy, her feminine instinct teaching her that thus she could most amply reward Robert’s generous pardon ; “I could not leave off loving you, however much I tried.”

An impartial looker-on might have felt tempted to ask : “Why, then, had she allowed herself to be over-ruled and over-

persuaded into marrying as she did?" But no such sceptical reflection occurred to Oldham. He had seen Lucy again, he had assured her of his forgiveness, of his unchanged devotion, he had heard her once more say she loved him, and he asked no more. He was almost sorry when she sent for her child to show him.

"Here is another Lucy," she said, as a lovely little girl, between three and four years old, crept shyly forward. "Come and kiss Uncle Robert."

The child complied; and when Oldham soon after took his leave, volunteered to repeat the salutation, adding—

"Now kiss mamma."

He read in the sick woman's eyes the permission he longed for, and for the last

time clasped his first love in his arms. The next morning, when he went to see her again, she was dead.

Five or six days later a simple funeral procession paused beneath the lych-gate of Selwood churchyard ; the only mourners being a young man whose pale face and tearless eyes spoke of the intensity of his grief, and a golden-haired child whom he was leading by the hand.

Awed and frightened, the little creature clung to him during the service ; and at its close, obedient to a sign he made, stepped forward and dropped upon the coffin a wreath of forget-me-nots.

As she stood beside the open grave, one might have almost fancied the ancient story of the phoenix to be no mere fable,

but a living truth, and this beautiful little Lucy, with her wondering azure eyes, to have sprung from her mother's ashes !

A plain stone cross marks the spot where Robert Oldham's first love rests. Upon it may be read the following inscription :—

L U C Y B R A I L S F O R D ,
Died August 16th, 1861,
A G E D 23 Y E A R S .

“ Would God I had died for thee ! ”—2 Sam. xviii. 33.





CHAPTER III.

SELWOOD CASTLE.

The storm-bent towers that many an age
Mocked at feudal warfare's rage,
Now in grey and quiet glory
Rest from the toils that crowd their story.

STERLING.



ANYONE who is old-fashioned enough, or simple enough in his tastes, to have real admiration ready to bestow on the beauties of his native land, cannot fail to be enchanted with Selwood Castle. The situation is perfect both as regards the building itself, which is displayed to the greatest possible advantage, and also as regards the varied and extensive views of the surrounding country,

which may be obtained from the grassy terrace, encircling it on three sides, and forming the inner edge of what was once the moat.


Those adventurous spirits, who dare to climb the half-ruined walls, are well rewarded for their pains by the sight of the splendid panorama stretching at their feet, from the base of the eminence on which the Castle proudly stands, far away to the blue and shining sea. Proudly *stood*, we ought, perhaps, rather to say, for it is more than half a ruin; and yet there is something very imposing about it still, it has the venerableness and hoary dignity of old age, without its extreme weakness and decrepitude; and though part of the interior has been arranged to serve for the

dwelling-house of the custodian, the modern element has been so skilfully adapted and carefully kept out of sight, that it does not clash painfully with the ancient, to which it is completely subordinate. And even the trim garden, with its flowering shrubs and many-hued blossoms, harmonises in a surprising manner with the whole picture, of which it certainly serves to heighten the effect, looking, as it does, like some bright child at play beside an aged grandfather.

Horace Furley's expedition to Selwood took place on Monday morning, as had been arranged, but the two young men did not ride thither, for Moreton suggested it would be much better he should drive his friend in the dog-cart.

“ We needn’t take a servant with us,” he added, “ to overhear all we say. The people at the inn shall put up the horse, and we can stay out as long as we like. We will go to the Castle first, then we will walk on into Fairport and get some lunch at the Red Lion, and afterwards you shall sketch Selwood Church, as you were so pleased with it yesterday.”

About ten o’clock they accordingly started, and soon after twelve entered the grassy space lying in front of the Castle and separating it from the lane by which it is approached. They rang the bell, and Robert Oldham at once appeared in answer to the summons; Moreton, who had escorted friends on similar expeditions several times before, greeted him very




civilly, and told him he had brought an American gentleman to see the Castle this time, a gentleman who was an artist too, and meant to make a picture of it.

“It is well worth painting, sir, if I may be allowed the remark,” said Oldham respectfully to Furley; and then the three started on their tour of inspection.

Furley’s admiration was sincere, and he was not sparing in his expression of it, to the gratification, in their several ways, of both his companions. Moreton, who had his own private designs and intentions, was particularly anxious that his friend should be favourably impressed with the place; while Oldham, who had really never seen any castle deserving of comparison with Selwood, honestly believed there

could be nothing finer, at home or abroad, and expatiated on all that was beautiful and curious about it with an affectionate pride which might have been that of ownership. He was thoroughly conversant too with every historical detail of interest connected with it, and gave his information in a most intelligent manner which delighted Furley, so that the two were soon on a most friendly footing; while Moreton, well content, walked silently beside them, his roving glances wandering incessantly hither and thither in the hope of espying Lucy, for he was quite determined not to go without seeing her, unless indeed she happened to have gone out to some distance, and he wanted to ascertain whether she was to be seen before ventur-



ing on any allusion to her. To tell the truth, he was rather shy of mentioning her, and kept hoping that Furley would do so, but he waited in vain; nor did he succeed in obtaining the merest glimpse of her. It was very seldom any of the visitors to Selwood did so, for Oldham had made an invariable practice of keeping her altogether out of their way ever since he had first brought her home after her mother's death. Even as a little child he knew that her beauty and winning ways would have attracted far more attention than could be good for her; as she grew older, he felt that the evil would be greater still, and so she had got in the habit of remaining indoors during the hours when the Castle was shown, "in order not to be

stared at when rude people come," as she phrased it in her simplicity.

The tour of the walls was completed at last, the moat had been examined and the ruins of the chapel; the age of the several parts had been conjectured, and there remained nothing more to be done but to take leave of Oldham before Furley should commence his sketch.

"I need not detain you any longer," Furley said to him; "I am so much obliged to you for all you have told me. I shall sketch the Castle from the front, Moreton," he went on, turning to his friend, "so I had better go and take up my position at once."

Oldham raised his hat, and turned into the path which led to his garden. As

soon as he was well out of earshot, Perceval went close up to the artist, full of suppressed excitement.

“We have had no chance as yet of seeing the Princess of the Castle, but I intend we should do so before we leave the place, as I told you while we were driving over. I am going to make an attempt now, for a bright idea has struck me, so come along, Furley, there is no time to lose,” he added hurriedly, seeing the artist hesitate.

“I would rather stay where I am,” said the latter, “I have only just found the best place for my sketch.”

Moreton did not wait to hear more ; he nodded acquiescence and hastened away, his rapid, active step enabling him to come

up with Oldham, as the latter was in the act of entering his own door.

“I am sorry to trouble you again,” Perceval began, panting and breathless from his run, “but we overtook you yesterday afternoon, if you remember, on our way to church, and my mother was so struck with the roses Miss Lucy was carrying that she could talk of nothing else all the way home. She is a great connoisseur in the matter of flowers, you know, so her praise is worth having ; and she commissioned me to ask if you would be so kind as to send her a single blossom, that our gardener may see about getting some plants of the same, for we have none half so fine at Moreton Park. I forgot all about her request until this moment, for I

was so interested in the antiquarian details you were giving that I could think of nothing else; so you must pardon this invasion of your territory," he added courteously.

He possessed the power of making himself irresistibly attractive to his inferiors when he chose, and he now willed to exercise this power upon Oldham; had the latter suspected, however, the ulterior object for which it was being put forth, he would have refused to yield to the fascination, but it never, of course, once crossed his mind that all this message about the roses was a pure fabrication, and that Mrs. Moreton had, in reality, never given them a thought beyond one of passing admiration. He was very simple and downright,

and very proud of his flowers, so he at once replied he should be delighted to oblige Mrs. Moreton, and forthwith set about gathering the roses. Still Perceval was no nearer seeing Lucy, and what more could he do ?

“ Might I also ask for the exact name of this variety,” he began again, “ and the address of the florist from whom you obtained it ? ”

This time he was fortunate, for Oldham looked in at the open window of a sitting-room, and said—

“ I wish you would bring me out my pocket-book, Lucy ; you will find it in my desk.”

In another moment the door of the house opened, and the goddess, thus invoked, stood revealed before them.

By what name might she most fitly be called? Was it Venus, Hebe, or Aurora, who stood blushing among the roses, herself the fairest flower in all the summer garden? She was a little over the middle height, not slender, but well made, her rounded figure with its graceful curves evidently owing nothing to the aid of art; her eyes were the colour of forget-me-nots, her hair looked as if the sunshine had got itself interwoven somehow in the luxuriant plaits which crowned her head and set off her lovely, blooming countenance. Nothing could be more unpretending than her manner and bearing, unless it was indeed her dress of lilac print, with a little sprigged pattern, her small black silk apron and collar and cuffs of spotless linen.

But Perceval's eyes never wandered from her face ; luckily for him, his very obvious admiration escaped the observation of Oldham, who was busy hunting for the florist's address.

“ Here it is, sir,” he said, after a few moments ; “ it is quite at the service of Mrs. Moreton.”

“ Would you kindly write it down ? I am not returning home quite immediately, and I have a desperate memory for names,” replied Perceval, glad to avail himself of any pretence for prolonging the interview, and looking all he dared not say, especially when Oldham disappeared into the house, and left him a moment or two alone with Lucy.

She had come out into the garden a

child, but Moreton's ardent gaze and the subtle flattery he contrived to instil under the cover of a few commonplace remarks, made her for the first time conscious of her charms.

A few moments more and he had taken leave, and was hastening back to his friend, who was getting very hungry, and therefore received all the raptures with which he was entertained in a cool, cynical manner, which caused Moreton to cut them rather shorter than he had intended.

Nothing particularly noteworthy occurred during the remainder of the day. After luncheon Furley made a sketch of the church, a sketch from which we may here remark by the way he afterwards

painted a picture called "A Village Church—Summer Afternoon," which was much admired when exhibited at Burlington House.

That evening, when the dessert was placed on the table, and the servants had left the dining-room, Perceval told the story of the roses, with some alterations, both by way of omissions and additions, it may easily be imagined; and though he was very careful, or thought he was, not to speak about Lucy more warmly than prudence might warrant, he yet woke the jealousy of Beatrice. For jealousy in women is an unerring instinct, it cannot be deceived; and rare indeed are the instances where it is found to be at fault.

The practical and observant eyes of

Horace Furley saw what Moreton was doing, though he himself was too absorbed to notice the effect of his own words.

Before the ladies moved into the drawing-room, the artist had discovered the secret which Beatrice Sarmiento was striving to conceal from the whole world, and even from herself; he perceived that she was in love with Perceval, who was so far from any thought of returning her affection, that he was not in the least aware of its existence.

“What are you thinking of, Perceval?” said Mrs. Moreton later in the evening.

Beatrice happened to be playing, and Furley was turning over the leaves of her music for her, so that the mother and son were practically alone together.

“I was thinking what a lovely picture Lucy Brailsford would make. I mean to paint her some day, mother.”

“What an idea !” began Mrs. Moreton. Then checking herself : “I don’t think that would quite do, for many reasons, I don’t indeed,” she concluded decisively.

Her son said nothing more, and the subject dropped, nor was it again alluded to by any one.

The Selwood roses bloomed for a few days in a blue china vase on one of the drawing-room tables, and were the admired of all beholders except Beatrice, who hated the sight of the innocent flowers, and managed to get them removed as soon as she had the slightest excuse for pronouncing them faded.

Horace Furley's visit in due time came to a termination ; and a few days later the Moretons returned to town for the remainder of the season. At its conclusion they went to Cowes for a fortnight or so, and then to their place in Yorkshire for the grouse shooting ; so that during the next few months their haunts in the south-west of England knew them no more. Lucy Brailsford seemed to be altogether forgotten ; but Perceval Moreton and Beatrice Sarmiento both thought of her sometimes, although with widely different feelings.





CHAPTER IV.

MORETON PARK.

An English home! grey twilight poured
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient peace.

TENNYSON.

THOUGH the Moretons belong to one of the oldest of our English families, it was only in the time of Percival's grandfather that their Moreton estate attained its present extensive proportions, owing to the occurrence of an opportunity which permitted its proprietor to acquire the two neighbouring properties and unite them with his own.

One belonged to an intimate friend of

his, who lost his fortune at cards, and was glad to dispose of his patrimony in order to be, if possible, set on his legs once more, especially as the terms offered him by Mr. Moreton were most liberal, and the sale was effected as privately as the nature of the affair allowed. The other estate was, for some reason or other, put up to public auction, and a most seasonable legacy just then enabled Mr. Moreton to purchase it.

He caused both mansions to be demolished, thoroughly incorporating the estates with his own, and this is the reason why the house in Moreton Park always strikes visitors as being hardly proportioned either in size or splendour to the princely extent of the surrounding

demesne, though it is a stately-looking edifice of red brick with a modern wing on each side. The beauty of the trees which adorn the grounds can scarcely be surpassed anywhere, but the owners of the place find in the thick masses of foliage a reason (or an excuse, if the reader likes to consider it such) for invariably absenting themselves during the autumn, until the leaves have finished falling and the air has become less damp.

This year it was later than usual before they came down, after paying a round of visits among their friends, so that Christmas was near at hand by the time they were settled at Moreton.

One bright frosty day Perceval entered his mother's private sitting-room soon

after breakfast, with an open letter in his hand. She was seated at her writing table, busy making out a list of invitations for a ball she was thinking of giving; but it was her habit to lay aside the occupation, whatever it might be, in which she happened to be engaged whenever her son wanted her in any way. He was so accustomed to this that he took it as his right, and a mere matter of course, and never dreamt of apologising for his interruption when Mrs. Moreton laid aside her pen, and came to seat herself in a low chair by the fire.

“I never get a chance of talking to you by myself now the house is so full of people,” he began; “I want you to read this letter of Furley’s. You know I half

promised to go to Rome with him in February, and he has written to tell me when he means to start. I am very much inclined to throw him overboard, and stay down here after all. I've got the idea in my head of a subject I mean to paint, and if you will let me have the small library in the north wing for a studio I could set to work at once, and finish my picture before we all go up to town."

Perceval had for many years had a room in the Moretons' house in Berkeley Square devoted to the purposes of art, and there he had been accustomed to spend many hours at his easel. It is only fair to add that his efforts were very successful, and that he certainly deserved to rank high among amateur artists. Hitherto, how-

ever, he had generally gone abroad every spring, and never been at Moreton any length of time at a season of the year when he had both the light needed for painting and the inclination to prefer this pursuit to that of the various field sports in which he also delighted.

Mrs. Moreton was overjoyed at the proposal. To have Perceval with her was her ideal of happiness ; his painting saved him from ennui, and kept him out of mischief, she thought, and she always encouraged him in it to the utmost of her power. So she gladly acceded to his plan of making the small library into a studio, promising he should be as undisturbed there, and as free from all intrusion, as he invariably was in his painting room in London. Her

son was pleased and grateful, and at once said he would give up the Roman plan, and spend the spring at home.

How often in this strange, bewildering life of ours, do we grieve when we should do more wisely to rejoice, and rejoice when we ought to grieve ! Could Mrs. Moreton have read her son's thoughts, she would have known that the proposal she welcomed with such eager delight, mainly because she thought it would bring her nearer to her desired goal, by promoting his marriage with Beatrice, was in reality to render that goal more distant than ever, and its attainment more difficult, if not altogether impossible !

Her tumult of pleasure was at the highest when Beatrice came into the

room for the purpose of arranging with her aunt the programme of the day's amusement.

She was dressed in black velvet, trimmed with sable, and she wore a coral brooch and earrings. She had never looked handsomer, her aunt thought, especially when the unexpected sight of her cousin caused her countenance to light up with pleasure, and summoned to her cheek the delicate colour which matched her ornaments so well. But Perceval saw her beauty as one that sees not, beholding it indeed with his bodily eyes, while a far different vision engrossed his mental gaze. He was thinking of Lucy Brailsford, whom he had by the merest accident encountered in a stationer's shop in Fairport a day or

two before. He had spoken to her, of course, and asked after Oldham, and he thought she had grown better-looking than ever, in the months which had passed since he saw her last, as she stood modestly at the counter waiting to be served, blushing with shy pleasure at his notice; so simply dressed, too, in dark blue serge, and a little black straw hat adorned with a sea-gull's wing.

“She shall and must sit to me!” he said to himself; and he was revolving in his mind the best means of executing his determination, and overcoming or removing the many and varied obstacles he knew to lie in his path.

He hardly heard his mother tell Beatrice he was going to remain with them at More-

ton instead of going to Rome; he hardly listened to his cousin's expressions of pleasure, and, instead of responding in the manner which might have been expected of him, he said somewhat abruptly :—

“Don't reckon on me, please, for this afternoon, but arrange the riding and driving parties quite independently of me, for I want to get off directly after luncheon, and ride into Fairport to see about some colours I have ordered.”

Mrs. Moreton and Beatrice were neither of them just then in the mood to find fault with anything he chose to say or do, so they acquiesced with the most convenient facility, and after a little further discussion the trio separated.

Beatrice had not for a long time felt so

happy ; Perceval meant to paint her, she felt sure of that. What a patient sitter she resolved to be ! With what docility she would receive his every suggestion ! with what eagerness comply with his every wish !

She thought of all the characters she might possibly be requested to personate on the canvas ; she ran over a mental list of all Moreton's favourite heroines, and suddenly remembering that he greatly admired Tennyson's " St. Agnes "—

" Even if he wants to paint me in a nun's dress, I will not refuse," she concluded, speaking half aloud in her eagerness.

Then, having wound herself to this pitch of magnanimity, she went down to luncheon, and it must be confessed that the

object of all her intended generosity did feel some slight compunction when he heard the charming way in which his mother made it easy for him to ride off alone.

“He is going into Fairport on some very special business,” she explained, in her sweet, clear voice.

However, the repentance of such a thoroughly spoilt child as Perceval can never be very deep or lasting, even if for the nonce it be sincere, and by the time he was riding quickly through the keen, bright air, he had forgotten all about his mother and Beatrice, and was intent only on gratifying his new fancy.

When he rang the bell at the door of the private portion of Selwood Castle, his tac-

tics were matured, and a plan of action was prepared which could not—so, at least, he flattered himself—terminate otherwise than by a surrender.

Robert Oldham opened the door, and warmly greeted his most unexpected visitor, who was soon established in the little unpretending sitting-room which looked out upon the garden, now so bare and desolate, where he had first spoken to Lucy.

He laid himself out to be agreeable to her guardian, and, after some commonplace remarks, announced his intention of spending a few months at Moreton.

Oldham was naturally not insensible to the flattery of being thus, as it were, taken into the confidence of one in so different a

social position to his own, especially when Perceval deigned further to explain the reason for his stay.

“I’m very fond of painting, you know, and I can get on so much better with my work down in the country than I can up in London,” he said.

At this juncture Lucy entered the room, greatly to his satisfaction, but he was too politic to bestow on her more than a few words of ordinary greeting, and he continued to address his conversation exclusively to Oldham, who, it must be remembered, had not been a witness to the interview in the garden, and had not heard of the recent meeting in the shop at Fairport, so that his suspicions had never been aroused in the slightest degree.

“I daresay you are wondering what brought me over this afternoon, Mr. Oldham,” he said at length.

“Well, since you say so, sir, I must own that I was,” responded Robert, rather bluntly.

Nothing daunted, however, Perceval went on—

“The truth is,” he said, with an air of assumed humility which made him irresistible, “I have come to ask you a great favour, and, indeed, I do not know how my new picture can ever be accomplished unless you will help me.”

Both his hearers, fairly surprised out of their good manners, could only stare at him in silence. He waited a few moments, but no answer came, and he proceeded to


tell them the beautiful legend of St. Elizabeth of Hungary and the roses. It is too well known to need repetition here, but to Perceval's listeners it was new, and they hung spell-bound on his lips.

"I knew the story would delight you both," he went on; "it has been a favourite of mine as long as I can remember, and now I mean to try and paint it. But I do not know where to find a St. Elizabeth unless"—boldly resolving to turn Oldham's softened mood to immediate account—"unless you would allow Miss Lucy to sit to me in the character; she would suit it so exactly," he finished, in a beseeching tone, not allowing himself more than a single glance at Lucy, and yet that glance sufficed to show him he had in her an ally.

“Do let me—pray do let me—I should like it so much!” she exclaimed.

While Robert had been bewildered by the new and startling idea, her quicker woman’s wit had travelled more rapidly, and taken in all the delights that his scheme involved, delights which her imagination magnified far beyond their real proportions, keeping out of sight the while, as the imagination of very young people has a trick of doing, all attendant drawbacks and disadvantages.

“You are very kind to say you would like it,” said Moreton, much gratified. “I will take care to give you as little trouble as possible, and I am sure you will not refuse us *both*, Mr. Oldham,” he added, turning to Robert, “especially as I know you



try to do all the good you can, and this is an opportunity for really advancing the cause of art!"

Of course Oldham had not an idea what this phrase meant. There is nothing like a few well-sounding phrases for imposing on the half-educated, and he was at a loss how to refuse the cultivated gentleman who made his request so politely and so plausibly. Besides, he always found it difficult, not to say impossible, to refuse to gratify any wish of Lucy's, and so the double pressure brought to bear on him was more than he could withstand, and he said "yes," as so many others have done, and will do to the end of the world, simply because he lacked the moral courage to say "no."

He disliked the plan in a manner for which he could hardly account to himself, though it sounded specious, and Perceval was anxious to remove every objection, and study the comfort and convenience of every one concerned (excepting, of course, himself).

“I will always send over for my kind sitter,” he explained, “and when she arrives the housekeeper shall take charge of her ; I will see to all that.”

The day and hour were finally arranged at last, and Perceval, taking a courteous and grateful leave of both Oldham and Lucy, departed in secret exultation.





CHAPTER V.

AN ARTIST AND HIS ART.

Those eyes, that mouth, the spirit there
Might well a Raphael's hand require
To give them all their native fire ;
And yet with patience you shall view
As much as paint and art can do !

GAY'S FABLES.

MRS. JENKINS, the housekeeper at Moreton Park, was Perceval's devoted slave, and he embraced an early opportunity of confiding to her his plan, and at the same time binding her to absolute secrecy concerning it.

"I want to surprise your mistress when the picture is finished," he said, "and she must not know anything at all about the

subject of it, so you must look after Miss Brailsford, who has kindly promised to sit to me. You must help her change her dress and all that ; I commit her to your care."

Perceval had indeed found a beautiful St. Elizabeth, and he could scarcely abstain from too open an expression of his admiration as Lucy entered the studio for the first time in the wake of Mrs. Jenkins, who was proud of her own success in the way of dressing up the girl.

"There, Mr. Perceval, doesn't she look lovely in all these beautiful clothes !" exclaimed the old woman guilelessly.

Her dress did indeed set her off to the very best advantage ; the plain gold circlet, scarcely more lustrous than her hair ; the

violet velvet mantle, and dress of pale green silk, heightened the effect of her radiant face, flushed with pleasure and excitement and the piquant novelty of her position.

The picture was begun, and soon bid fair to be the best the artist had ever painted, perhaps because he thought that the hours he now passed at his easel were the happiest he had ever spent, for when Lucy was not there he thought of her with gratitude, and attributed to her the success which might have been more justly attributed to his own increased efforts and unremitting diligence.

So the weeks went by, and the months, and those two gradually drew together, though nothing like love-making, strictly

so called, was ever carried on in the studio.

Lucy's shyness had been quickly overcome, but she was not naturally talkative, so that she did not care to speak often, or at any great length. Nevertheless, Perceval found in her a ready listener, as we may well suppose, and many were the legends he related, especially as her comments, if rare, were always amusing, for she possessed great natural intelligence, and her perceptions were remarkably quick.

She was younger than her actual age from having been brought up in such retirement, and there was a simplicity about her which was irresistibly fascinating, quite apart from the attraction of her beauty.

She admired everything at Moreton in so genuine a manner as quite to win the heart of old Mrs. Jenkins; yet it never occurred to her to value Perceval's kindness any more because he was the owner of all this grandeur; she liked him for himself, quite apart from his possessions. He saw that she did so, and grew fonder of her than ever.

"How shall I tell my mother? How shall I show her the picture?" were questions which would sometimes intrude themselves as his work drew nearer and nearer to its inevitable completion.

From premature discovery he felt tolerably safe, as the entire north wing of the mansion had for several years been appropriated to his use; indeed, on leaving Ox-

ford, he had bargained for complete independence at home, and entire liberty to do as he chose, otherwise he declared his intention of setting up a separate establishment of his own. He found no difficulty in evading the queries addressed to him from time to time, or if these grew at all more curious and importunate than he liked, he well knew how to enshroud himself and his doings in an impenetrable veil of mystery.


In spite of all his easy, attractive manners, and apparent good-nature, there was something about him, every one confessed, which rendered it exceedingly difficult, not to say impossible, to question him at all closely, or obtain from him any information he did not altogether see fit to give.

Besides, Lucy did not come over very often after all, and was invariably driven in the back way. But for once fortune did not favour him; I suppose the fickle goddess thought she had been constant far too long already, and so upon a certain unlucky morning, when the mysterious picture was fast approaching completion, she actually presumed to thwart his wishes.

The catastrophe came about in the following manner : The family solicitor happened to arrive unexpectedly, the letter which he wrote to announce his coming never having reached its destination. The business upon which he came was important, and admitted of no delay, so Mrs. Moreton was compelled, however reluc-

tantly, to allow Perceval to be disturbed. Resolving to go herself and seek him, she found him in the studio, and unfortunately Lucy was there also, for almost the last time too, which made the matter all the more provoking.

Mrs. Moreton had many old-fashioned ideas, it is true, but she was too much a woman of the world not to have her feelings under complete control as far as any exhibition of them might be concerned, and she hated above all things the least approach to a "scene." Therefore she showed nothing of the anger and mortification she experienced, but warmly admired the picture upon the easel, and then quietly apologised for her own intrusion, explaining its cause and the necessity for her son's



presence, and taking care to bestow on Lucy, before leaving the room, a glance of cold contempt which made the girl feel thoroughly uncomfortable.

His mother's acting had been so good as to deceive Perceval, who drew a deep sigh of relief as she closed the door behind her.

"That's well got over!" he ejaculated with fervour; yet it must be owned that, when the luncheon-bell rang, he was glad to find some visitors had arrived, and glad also to remember that he was engaged to dine that evening with a friend who lived about twelve or fifteen miles away.

Mrs. Moreton and Beatrice dined *tête-à-tête*, therefore, and the meal was not a cheerful one, though Mrs. Moreton talked more than usual. Beatrice had suspected

at luncheon there must be something the matter; she now felt sure of it, and with rapid intuition divined that the "something" must have reference to Perceval.

"Auntie," she said, gently, as soon as the two were in the drawing-room, "won't you tell me what is vexing you so much? Is it—is it—anything about Perceval?" she added in a still lower voice, seating herself beside Mrs. Moreton, and taking the elder lady's hand caressingly in her own.

"Shall I tell her?" Mrs. Moreton asked herself; "she must know it some time or other." Then aloud: "Yes, dear, it is about Perceval."

"Money worries?" inquired the girl, softly, thinking naturally of the lawyer's visit.

“I wish that was all,” responded poor Mrs. Moreton; “no Beatrice, it’s not that. Perhaps I am making it of undue importance, but I cannot help being vexed about it; the fact is, he has been painting Lucy Brailsford.”

The colour flashed over Beatrice’s face; she dropped her eyes, and bit her lip.

“Only think,” continued Mrs. Moreton, “I had to go into the studio this morning, and there I found her, dressed up in a fantastical manner. I never thought he really meant it, when he talked about her in that way last summer, and hoped the silly scheme was quite forgotten; he talks of doing so many things he never does after all. However, I have all along disliked the mystery he made about this

picture; I thought there would be something in the background he wished to conceal from me. No doubt it is all the girl's fault, I always fancied her so simple, and good too, but those quiet girls who look so simple are the most artful of all. They are far more dangerous than the noisy ones, and far more designing, there is no saying to what extent she may entrap Perceval."

"Lucy has often occurred to my mind since I have been back at Moreton," said Beatrice; "but I, too, fancied Perceval thought no more of her; and, as to the picture, I imagined he was sure to tell us about it sooner or later, as he has always done before, although he does not like his work inspected at a very early stage of

progress. His silence has vexed me very much sometimes, I could hardly tell why," she concluded.

Mrs. Moreton soon afterwards said good-night, glad to be alone with her own thoughts. She could do nothing in the matter, to whatever pass things might have come, of that she was only too well aware; she had given way to her son for twenty-six years, and what hope could there be of his yielding to her now?

"He has seemed so bright and happy lately with Beatrice and me," said the poor woman to herself, "and all the while he has been falling in love with that odious girl! For he *is* in love with her. I could see it in a moment, though I did not choose to tell Beatrice so. I wonder how

she will meet Perceval, or what she will do !”

What Beatrice did that evening was to go and look at the picture. She had borne herself well while her aunt's eyes were upon her, but as soon as the restraint of Mrs. Moreton's presence was withdrawn, she gave uncontrolled vent to the bitterness of her feelings. Not for long, however ; she soon dried her eyes, and, taking a lamp from the hall table, made her way to Perceval's rooms.

The library he had converted into a studio was divided by a heavy velvet *portière* ; slowly she put the hangings aside and stepped into the studio proper ; then, coming in front of the easel, she held her lamp so as to light up the picture upon it.

Poor Beatrice, she had never drunk of the cup of humiliation until now, and the draught was very bitter to her lips! For there stood Lucy, the rustic nobody, the girl whom Robert Oldham had brought up out of charity, arrayed in the rich dress of a margravine, idealised, transfigured, refined, with all the rusticity gone from her beauty, and the too high colouring of her face toned down into the most delicate imaginable bloom.

There she stood, a rival, and a formidable one, as Beatrice could not help owning, however reluctantly, while she stood gazing upon the picture with that fixed intensity which belongs alike to hatred and to love.

“So you are a margravine and a saint, O most bewitching Lucy!” she broke

out at last, apostrophizing the portrait as if it had been a flesh-and-blood reality ; “ it is very delightful, no doubt, especially as you are no less far removed from being a saint than a margravine ! How fond you must have made Perceval of you before he could paint you like that ! Why did you steal his heart from me ? ” she went on, illogical in her anger, as women always are, and forgetting that what we have never possessed cannot be stolen from us ; “ I am rich, and you are poor, but I would part with all I have if I could only win the heart of Perceval.”

Beatrice greeted her cousin the next morning in the prettiest way, however, informing him of her secret visit to his studio, and paying him the most charming

compliments upon his skill and success. Yet, despite the efforts made by all the three persons principally concerned, things would not go on pleasantly at Moreton Park. Mrs. Moreton feared to make the matter seem too important if she spoke about it at all, so she let things take their course; but she was very anxious and unhappy, and her manner to Perceval grew less cordial and more constrained. He felt that his mother was intensely annoyed, though she did not choose to own it, and as he disliked vexing any one, if he could avoid doing so without incurring the sacrifice of his own whims and wishes, he was thoroughly uncomfortable, and kept to himself as much as possible. He was kinder than ever to Beatrice, when he

was with her, a kindness which she secretly resented as being a form of pity, and such, indeed, it was.

Thus Elizabeth of Hungary, who in her lifetime had delighted in nothing so much as in doing every kind of good, and relieving every kind of sorrow, became the unconscious instrument of bringing perplexity and unhappiness and vague apprehension into the household at Moreton Park; as if the roses in her lap had in their turn undergone a transformation, and been changed into prickly and vexatious thorns.

Nor did the humble household at Selwood Castle escape these disturbing influences. Every day Oldham more bitterly repented having allowed Lucy to go over to Moreton, as he daily saw her grow more

restless, and more dissatisfied with the home in which she had hitherto been so happy.

For the first time he felt she had interests apart from himself, interests into which he could not enter, try as he might ; interests, moreover, which she did not even wish him to share. He saw her return from Moreton full of excitement, which was not happiness, flushed with admiration, becoming more and more absorbed in the books Mr. Moreton lent her ; the wonderful tales Mr. Moreton told her, and more and more impatient of the petty details and narrow interests which fill the contracted circle of a simple homely existence, in the country particularly, yet beyond which she had, hitherto, had neither desires nor wishes. She did not now care to hear how many

eggs the speckled hen had laid, nor what buds there were on the Marshal Niel rose ; to her it was a matter of indifference whether there would be a large crop of strawberries or no, nor did she learn with pleasure that the weasel, which ate the young ducklings, had been trapped at last.

Unconscious of the change in herself, she mentally accused Oldham of having changed, and wondered what could make him so cross, and why he looked at her in such an odd way sometimes. Nor is it surprising that she should ask herself such questions, for he had changed too ; but of the alteration which had been slowly and surely effected in the feelings of the lowlier of the two heroes of my story, I shall have more to say in another place.



CHAPTER VI.

SILENCED, NOT CONVINCED.

You asked your friend for his advice,
Did you intend to take it ?
You made your mind up twice or thrice,
Then why so oft unmake it ?

OLD SONG.

PERCEVAL MORETON could not decide the question which at that time occupied his thoughts and engrossed his reflections to the exclusion of all other interests ; he could not make up his mind to ask Lucy to marry him. Passionately as he admired her beauty, and deeply as he loved her (or thought he did) he yet shrank from committing himself by a definite offer.

This hesitation arose partly from a tendency to procrastination which was inherent in his nature, and made him always ready to embrace any plausible pretext for delaying an important decision ; but partly also from the high sense of honour, which was a no less marked feature in his character, and induced the unconscious conviction that if he once pledged himself, he could never do otherwise than fulfil his promise, be the after-consequences what they might.

It was not from lack of leisure and opportunity for reflection that he was so slow in making up his mind, since he was now alone at Moreton Park, though the season could hardly be said to be ended.

Decidedly he had not enjoyed it as much

as usual, in spite of all the admiration lavished on his picture, which had been a great success, having been exhibited in one of the most fashionable galleries for the reception of amateur productions, and even made the subject of some very favourable notices in two or three prominent papers. His friends moreover all congratulated and complimented him ; but the pleasure he derived from the kind and flattering things they said was not unmixed with secret uneasiness, especially as the original of the portrait became of necessity a frequent and prominent theme of conversation, and the subject of many a query both serious and sportive.

He could not fail to see how much his mother disliked to find Lucy an object of

curiosity and interest; and to have the girl, whom she would so gladly have forgotten, constantly brought before her mind. He could not bear to hear the cold, half-contemptuous way in which she spoke of her, especially as he was perfectly aware that open blame took the place of mere negative disparagement whenever he was not within hearing; and he chafed all the more under the surface, because he gave no open expression to his feelings. Mrs. Moreton never failed, moreover, to give him elaborate accounts of the offers Beatrice received, and the unhesitating manner in which she refused them.

Thus it came to pass that it was a relief to all the three when Mrs. Moreton one day declared her intention of setting out

at once to visit a sister of hers who was living near Brussels, and who had been out of health for some months.

"I shall take Beatrice with me, Perceval," she added, "and we can go on to Switzerland when the weather grows hot."

"And I shall go down to Moreton for a week or two," rejoined her son.

"Go down to Moreton!" she repeated, after him; "really you must be mad!"

"I shall go down to Moreton," again said Perceval, and his mother knew there was nothing for her but to hold her peace.

A week or two subsequent to this conversation, Perceval was pacing up and down the terrace one day after luncheon, smoking a cigar.

"If only some impartial person could

hear the whole story, and then give me a candid opinion," he said to himself ; " some one who has never heard all the absurd stuff my mother talks, just because she wants me to marry Beatrice ; women are so terribly prejudiced, as Furley always says, and I'm sure he is right. Why should I not run up to town and tell him my difficulties ? " Moreton went on, delighted with the new idea which had so opportunely occurred to him. " He does not go abroad for another three weeks or so ; he said he meant to finish the picture, he is at work upon, before he ventured to take a holiday."

He stepped back into the library, sat down at his writing-table and wrote two letters ; one to apprise Furley of the visit

in store for him on the morrow, the other to desire such preparations to be made in Berkeley Square as would enable him to dine and sleep there, in case he failed to be in time for the last train by which he might return to Moreton Park. These being finished he rang the bell, and gave orders that his horse should be brought to the door as soon as possible, and he was soon on his way to Selwood. Lucy was looking remarkably pretty that afternoon, and her efforts to please him were crowned with such success, that as he rode slowly home to dinner, he could not but be aware that her cause was more than half gained. In fact he went so far as to repent the appointment he had made, and to question whether he had not better send a telegram

to Furley the next morning, and instead of going to town, ride over again to Selwood and ask Lucy to be his wife. However, he finally resolved on adhering to his original plan, and went to bed in the most cheerful of moods, repeating to himself over and over again that when he had heard all Furley had got to say, he would be just as much at liberty as ever to do exactly as might seem right in his own eyes—a course of conduct he had been steadily pursuing all his life.

Horace Furley's establishment possessed at least one undeniable merit, that of originality ; some uncharitable persons had even been heard to hazard the remark, that it would be well for him if his pictures were half as original. But this severe

criticism was on the whole undeserved, for his pictures possessed more than average merit, and he managed to live very comfortably by the sale of them, which is more than can be said with regard to some members of his profession. It is true that what he called comfort, many people would have described as exactly the reverse; his dwelling, situated at the end of some pleasure grounds, had been erected in view of being used as stabling; he had taken it on a long lease at a very low rental, and had altered it so as to adapt it to his own purposes. The living-room over the stable was his bedroom; the stable itself his kitchen and dining-room, and he had added a studio in which he was "at home" two afternoons a week during the season, and

received his numerous acquaintances in a style, Bohemian it must be confessed, but perhaps all the more amusing for that. Those who did not think the drive out to Haverstock Hill too long and fatiguing, were always well rewarded for the trouble they took. His more intimate friends received a hearty welcome at all times, though he had not even one regular servant, but only an elderly "help" as he called her, who came and went as she was wanted. He was his own cook, and an admirable one, as his friends readily owned, though they were fain to add that the *menu* was of the simplest, and moreover, singularly unvaried. However, his wine was excellent, and so were his cigars, and in this way he managed to cover a multitude of sins.

He went a great deal into society, not the best of course, but then there is plenty of society which is good, without being the best, and he had seen and heard quite enough to make him competent to discuss Perceval Moreton's future, in view of his really becoming the husband of Lucy Brailsford. He had himself never married ; he denied ever having been in love, and it is certain he had never been engaged.

“ If I cannot have things just as I like,” he used to say, “ I prefer to go without them altogether. The girl I should care to marry would not care to marry me ; and I could not afford to live as a married man in a manner I should consider suitable.”

Moreton found him hard at work on a picture he had been commissioned to paint

for a wealthy fellow-countryman. After a little desultory conversation, Furley said abruptly :—

“Now Moreton, what is it you want to talk over with me? Only don’t waste any more time in beginning, but go straight to the point, there’s a good fellow! Are you wishing to consult me about your new picture? I thought you would find the subject you mentioned difficult to handle, when once you set to work, in spite of the confident tone you wrote in.”

“My picture, indeed! my picture!” Perceval broke out impatiently, getting up and pushing back his chair. He paced the studio in silence for two or three minutes, then stopped opposite his friend, and asked without further prelude :—

“What do you say to my marrying Lucy Brailsford?”

“It would never do,” was the mental verdict Horace instantaneously pronounced; “it shall not be, if anything I can say will prevent such an egregious piece of folly,” he went on, still to himself, “but is not this foolish boy’s mind made up already?”

Perceval felt the silence to be ominous—silence under such circumstances always is—and he prepared himself to face the opposition he knew to be coming. Opposition, if incautiously offered, was very apt to irritate him; Furley knew this, and hesitated how to answer. In order to gain a few moments for reflection without betraying his perplexity more than he could help, he replied by another query.

“Are you in earnest, Moreton, when you ask me this, or is it only a new edition of your old stories of flirtation?”

“I can’t imagine why you should think I am joking,” rejoined Perceval; “I know I have amused myself with a great many girls, but Lucy is the first one I have really loved. Twice at least I have been on the point of asking her to be my wife, and it has been no fault of my own that I did not actually do so. The first time—let me see—Mr. Harcourt, the vicar, came in *mal-à-propos* to make a pastoral visitation, and I took my leave at once, for he is no favourite, as you are aware. The last time it was all Robert Oldham’s fault; I was walking about the garden with Lucy, and somehow we came upon him at every turn. It was

as if he knew my intention, and had resolved to prevent me from carrying it out. Do you know, I sometimes fancy the poor old fellow is jealous of me!" and he broke out into a merry laugh at so preposterous an idea. "I think Oldham is hardly more than forty after all," he added, "though he looks fifty at least, his lameness gives him age, I suppose. I have not been over to Selwood more than three or four times, then I only went because my picture was finished, and I could not have Lucy over to Moreton any longer; and I always made some excuse or other for going, so as not to excite more suspicion than I could help."

"So much the better," reflected Furley. "He is after all not such an eager lover if he can remember to be a prudent one. I

cannot imagine," he went on aloud, " what has put into your head the idea of marrying Lucy. Painting her was all very well, no doubt, but if we artists were to marry all the pretty women we may chance to paint, we should finish by having a hundred wives at least."

" Everything can be made to look ridiculous," Perceval said with some annoyance; " but then you do not know Lucy. She is as good as she is pretty, besides being awfully fond of me."

" What disinterested affection ! " the artist could not help exclaiming, and there was an inflection in his voice very like a sneer.

But he wronged Lucy, who was innocent of the artful scheming attributed to her;

indeed it was only quite lately that the idea of Perceval as a possible husband had ever occurred to her mind, the region in which he lived and moved was so far above her, so entirely distinct from her own. She was not a vain girl, by any means ; she could not help knowing herself to be handsome, but she rated her beauty too low and never dreamt that it might become a passport into a higher circle of society.

Perceval knit his brows, and Furley saw he must be more careful.

“ I daresay she is very fond of you,” he went on : “ but a man in your position has other questions to consider as well. Do not misunderstand me ; I know you are rich enough to do without fortune in your wife, and the fact that Lucy is penni-

less need make no difference to you ; but have you realized the dimensions of the social gulf which separates you from her ? I have seen a great deal of the world, Moreton, as you know ; and of course I have met with instances of such marriages, but they do not seem generally to turn out happy ones. It is so much better when men marry in their own social sphere ; and if you are searching for beauty and affection, you need not look far, I fancy, to find them combined. You know better than even I do how universally Miss Sarmiento is admired, and the few opportunities I have had of observation, have been sufficient to convince me how fond she is of you."

" My mother has made an ally of you,"

said Moreton, not very good-humouredly. "I do believe she will never let poor Beatrice marry as long as there is any hope of me, though I have told her again and again that, apart from any one else, my cousin is not the sort of girl I should choose for a wife. She is very good-looking, and amiable enough, I don't deny, but I am heartily tired of the feminine portion of my own social sphere, as you call it; that is partly why I have taken to Lucy as I have done. She is so different to the young ladies one meets; they all make the very same remarks on the very same subjects, and I get so tired of saying things over and over again in ball-room after ball-room, at garden-party after garden-party, at Ascot and Goodwood, Henley

—

and Cowes ! Just think how delightful it would be to take Lucy everywhere, and show her everything ; all would be new to her, and her unsophisticated enjoyment of everything would be so charming. I am sure her naïve remarks will amuse me as I have not been amused for a long time."

"In my opinion naïve remarks are more amusing when made by strangers, than when the authors of them are nearly related to oneself," Horace put in drily, "and unless I am greatly mistaken, Lucy will say a good many things which you will not find so entertaining as you imagine. Besides, you don't mean to be always alone with her, I suppose ; and how will you relish it when she says and does all sorts of things which will make people open

their eyes and ask who she was, if they don't already know? You remember Sir John Borland, he married his sister's nursery governess, a clever young person and fairly educated. She took to her new position like a duck to the water, but the secret could not be kept. She was staying in a country house somewhere in the north of England, and a question arose at a dinner party about precedence. Her remarks upon the subject were both naïve and amusing, no doubt; but you should have seen the look her husband gave her! Husbands don't overhear all their wives say; but if Lucy utters two or three solecisms when you are alone together, you will never like to trust her out of ear-shot. Then think of all the odd things

she will do as well as say, and how strange her untrained voice will sound ! ”

“ I mean to take her abroad as soon as we are married,” Perceval exclaimed ; “ and to travel for a year or two. Even after that I should not bring her to Moreton, I never liked the neighbourhood ; my mother shall live there, she was always fond of it, and I will settle at our place in Yorkshire, for a good many years at least. Besides, Lucy shall have regular lessons.”

“ If she consents to this arrangement, she will be almost the first woman who was ever willing to go back to school after she married, except in the old days when people were married as mere children. You reckon without your host, Moreton.”

“ It appears that a man should marry

to please his friends instead of himself," rejoined Perceval; "but I must be going, now I am afraid, for it is getting very late. Good-bye Furley, I have taken up a great deal of your time."

"Good-bye, Moreton, and remember the Spanish saying, which bids you measure seven times and cut once."

"I was a fool to ask that fellow Furley about the matter, he can't understand a man's feelings," soliloquized Moreton, as he settled himself in the hansom which was taking him home to dinner.

"A man must be a fool if he chooses," said Furley to himself, as he looked after his departing friend; "if it really comes to Moreton's marrying that girl, what a row his mother will make."



CHAPTER VII.

A SUMMER AFTERNOON.

Jasmine is sweet and has many loves
And the broom's betrothed to the bee,
But I will plight with the dainty rose,
For fairest of all is she.

Hood.



ON the morning of the day following that on which the conversation just recorded was held, the ten o'clock express train took Perceval Moreton down again into the country. His frame of mind was hardly less irresolute than it had been when he went up to town ; but if Horace had done little in the way of helping him to arrive at the decision which he at the same time dreaded and desired, the artist

had at least succeeded in making his friend increasingly alive to the way in which people in general would view the step he was meditating. The open opposition of his mother and of the few friends who were intimate enough to speak their mind plainly Moreton was perfectly ready to meet; but he winced at the thought of the comments which the wide circle of his acquaintance would make, and of what would be said behind his back by those who were not on terms permitting them to express their sentiments to his face. However, by the time he had arrived at the station, and, stepping into the phaeton in waiting for him, had taken the reins from the servant, and was preparing to drive the perfectly matched pair of bays home

to Moreton Park, his mood had grown more independent.

“Was ever a man more entirely his own master than I am, or more absolutely free to please himself?” he mentally asked, as the horses moved swiftly between the flowering hedges; “Lucy is good enough for me, notwithstanding everything Furley may say. What are all the fashionable young ladies worth, or what is their affection worth either? They merely try to dispose of themselves to the best advantage, and I am simply in their eyes an excellent match. Now Lucy likes me for myself, not because I am well off.”

Here Perceval, who had not the least tendency to underrate himself and his own personal and social advantages, made a

mental catalogue of them all; and the result of the enumeration was that he reached his hall door in the highest possible spirits fully determined to see Lucy again without delay.

“See that luncheon is on the table by one o’clock, Lawless,” he accordingly said to his manservant next morning; “and tell them to bring the dog-cart with Black Bess round half an hour later. But I shall not want any one to go with me, as I mean to drive myself.”

“Yes sir, very well sir,” duly responded the domestic, and forthwith departed to deliver his master’s orders, in the house-keeper’s room first of all, then down at the stables.

“Master was always fond of driving

himself, but he used to take one of the grooms with him to hold the horse, open gates and such-like," he could not help remarking to Mrs. Jenkins, when he had given the message about the hour of luncheon, "and when gentlemen all at once take such a fancy for going out by themselves, it is because they are after mischief, take my word for that," he wound up sententiously.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Lawless," retorted the loyal old woman, "to be talking of Mr. Perceval in this way; is it for such as us, I wonder, to sit in judgment on our betters? When I was a girl, what the gentry did was right just because they did it, but times are changed, more's the pity, times are changed!"

And she bustled away to confer with her subordinates respecting the concoction of some favourite dish for the luncheon of her adored Mr. Perceval, to be served up as a sort of reparation for the profane remarks of the audacious Lawless. She belonged to a generation fast disappearing from the earth, namely the race of obedient and devoted servants.

“ He looks like a king, God bless him ! ” she said later on, as she watched him drive away down the avenue, the sunlight dancing on his crisp chestnut curls, and touching them here and there with gold. Modern systems of education are fast eradicating from the minds of the lower orders ideas which for ages have been firmly rooted there; whether

the change is for good or evil, I will not pause to discuss. But of all these old-fashioned ideas none will be more reluctantly abandoned than that which connects fitness to rule with lofty stature. When the Israelites of old elected Saul to be their king they certainly acted wisely, in view of his influencing the masses, however great his deficiencies in other respects may have been.

As the dog-cart drew up at the outer gate of Selwood Castle, Oldham happened to be standing close by, so that Moreton was able to address him without alighting.

“Good-morning,” he said brightly, in his pleasantest voice, for he saw that he was not a welcome apparition. “What splendid weather we are having! Your

hay is all cut, I see ; you had a good crop, I hope?" Then, without pausing for a reply, "Is there any one who can hold my horse's head for half an hour? I have driven over to see Miss Lucy."

"I knew that before you told me," answered Oldham, irritated to find Moreton had come again so soon, and becoming rude in his anger, as those who lack good breeding never fail to do, "though it is only two or three days since you were here last. But you are likely to wait a good many half-hours without seeing Lucy this time I reckon, for she has gone to take tea with some friends who live four or five miles from here, and won't be home till evening."

Perceval was invariably gracious to his


inferiors as long as they remembered to show him due respect, but no one froze more quickly into haughty coldness when that respect failed to be paid him.

"I wish you good-day," he now said loftily, and drove off at full speed, following by the merest chance the very road Lucy had taken not long before. Oldham, who was watching him, saw that he did so, and muttered something between his teeth which was certainly not a benison. He was thoroughly out of temper, annoyed with Perceval, annoyed with himself, and ashamed of his rudeness, now that he thought over what he had said, especially as he saw how he had defeated his own ends.

"I have been a cursed fool," he said to

himself. "If only I had been civil to Mr. Moreton, and asked him in on some pretext, or at least kept him in conversation as long as I could, Lucy would have had more time to proceed on her way, whereas now I am afraid he will overtake her before she turns into the fields. He will offer to drive her to the Smiths' and there is no telling what he may say to her going along. Oh! Lucy, Lucy! must you be taken from me as your mother was nearly twenty years ago? It did not turn out to be for her happiness to have left me, and it will not for yours either! Must I be sacrificed a second time, and a second time for nothing?"


The reader will certainly not need to be told that Oldham's regrets were far from



being entirely unselfish, or dictated altogether by a desire for Lucy's happiness. He did not merely wish that Perceval should not have her ; he wished besides to have her himself. By the side of the parental affection he had entertained for her during many years, there had been silently growing up of late a very different feeling, first called into being, perhaps, by the sight of Moreton's admiration ; since nothing so heightens a man's value for the beauty of a woman as to witness the intensity of another man's appreciation of it. The acute pain occasioned him by the bare idea of Lucy's marriage (quite apart from the unsuitability of her marrying Moreton) had revealed to Oldham the true state of his own heart, as is often the case under

similar circumstances, and made him only too plainly aware that he no longer loved Lucy as a father loves his child, but as a man loves the woman he wishes to marry. At first he refused to own the fact, even to himself, and struggled hard against the feeling.


“I thought I had done with all that,” he said, “when I stood by the grave of my first love. It is absurd for me, with my wooden leg, and grizzled locks too,” he added, as he remembered the white hairs he had detected in his beard and about his temples, and almost blushed with undefined shame, especially as he well knew that Lucy was totally in the dark as to the real cause of that change in him which she had not failed to observe. On the occasion in



question, however, he knew that he could do nothing, but must let things take their course, so he did what a wise man will, if he can, always do if he is ruffled ; he went and lit his pipe.

What a much worse place, and what a much more miserable place, this world would be if it were not for tobacco ! How many half-formed schemes of evil float harmless into space, wafted upward from the bowl of a pipe, and are heard of no more ! How large an amount of discontent and depression is soothed, if not dispelled by the simple process of smoking a cigar !

Perceval Moreton did not, as we have said, in the least know which way Lucy had gone, and it was with equal surprise and pleasure that he now perceived her in



front of him after he had driven two or three miles from Selwood Castle, on his way to pay a long-deferred visit to an old college friend living at Brenley, an out-of-the-way village among the hills. He reined in his horse as he came up with Lucy, who started at seeing him thus unexpectedly, and coloured all over with pleasure and surprise.

“I am lucky after all to-day,” he said, “though I was so vexed to find you out when I called at Selwood just now. I can’t think what makes Oldham so surly to me; I couldn’t venture to ask which way you had gone, but it does not matter, as I have contrived to find out for myself. But tell me whither you are bound, Elizabeth?” he added playfully.

“I am going to drink tea at Mr. Smith’s ; his farm is two miles this side of Brenley, and they have got a haymaking party this afternoon.”

“More luck for me !” cried Moreton joyously ; “that is my road too, for I am going to pay a call at Brenley myself. So jump up beside me, and I will drive you as far as the top of the lane leading to the Smiths’. There’s something I want to say to you, Lucy,” he continued in a lower voice, bending down to her.

Her heart gave a great leap, and she coloured more deeply than ever, and thought, “What can this something be ?”

Without further hesitation she mounted, as Perceval desired her, to the seat beside him.

It must be confessed his first thought, as he contemplated her in this close proximity, was the very unloverlike one that she was somehow not looking nearly so pretty as usual. In this he was right, for Lucy's holiday attire was not calculated to set off her charms, and could not fail to offend his critical eye and correct taste. To honour Mrs. Smith's entertainment she had arrayed herself in a dress of bright blue, and adorned her head with a wondrous hat, in which waved a white ostrich feather, while a group of red roses blossomed in the front. Moreton would not allow his mind to dwell upon her gaudy attire.

"She has so much sense," he said to himself; "a few hints would soon set her right."

Then he again looked into her face.

“How happy it makes me to be with you,” he began, more tenderly than he had ever spoken to her before. “If you did but know all I feel for you! It was your doing that my last picture succeeded so well; you must let me paint you again next winter. I shall never find such another model, look as I may; there is no one like you, no one, Lucy.”

He shifted the reins into his right hand, looked up the road and down the road; then, seeing no one, passed his left hand round her waist, drawing her closer to him, the horse having dropped into a walk.

“Oh! Mr. Morton!” she exclaimed; then she was silent, for the best of

reasons, that she did not know what else to say.

This unresisting silence encouraged Moreton, as was natural.

“Lucy,” he began again, “you haven’t an idea how fond I am of you ; you haven’t indeed ! I wish I could have you with me always, instead of just now and then ; I mean ”—

But he was destined never to explain what he meant, nor to finish his sentence, nor to carry out his intention of kissing his companion, which in another moment he would have infallibly executed, for at that instant there vaulted over a stile the friend he was on his way to visit, and a more unwelcome interruption could not possibly be imagined.

Moreton's politeness was severely taxed, but he contrived to repress his irritation and greet Reginald Turville with well-feigned cordiality, while the latter performed a no less difficult feat, in that he repressed every appearance of surprise or glance of curiosity.

"Who could have thought to see you here, Moreton?" he said. "Are you going to pay me a visit at last? You won't find me at home as you perceive, but my wife is in, and she will be delighted to see you."

"Yes, I am on my way to your house," replied Perceval; "but why can't you come back with me? I was just going to put this young lady down. Lucy," he went on, turning to her and speaking

rapidly in an undertone, "you can walk the rest of the way. I'll give you another lift in the evening if you'll be at the top of the Smiths' lane by seven, and wait for me there."

It is unnecessary to say that he had withdrawn his arm from around her waist, and that he hoped (oh, how vainly!) the action had been unobserved by his friend.

"I can't allow that," said Turville; "I can very well walk, or," seeing Lucy preparing to alight, "stop, I will get up behind."

Lucy persisted, however, and Moreton showed no wish to detain her, so Turville gave way.

"Don't trouble yourself to move then,"

he said ; “ it will be only a pleasure for me to help this young lady down.”

He moved slowly round to the other side of the dog-cart.

Take her down tenderly,
Touch her with care,
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young and so fair,

he sang as he did so, adapting the well-known lines of Hood to an air much in vogue, and gazing into Lucy's face with an expression she had never seen in any man's eyes before.

Young and simple as she was, she could not fail to perceive his meaning, as she had read the poem he quoted, and knew about what manner of woman it was written. She saw what an imputation her false position had brought upon her, and crimsoned

with shame and anger, especially when Turville assisted her from the dog-cart in a very free manner, and held her in his arms longer than was at all necessary.

“Haven’t you got a kiss for me?” he whispered, as he helped her up the bank, not noticing that her eyes were full of tears, which fell in abundance as soon as she was left to herself.

She seemed to hate Perceval, his friend, her own folly, every one and everything, and wished over and over again she had persisted in walking on to the Smiths’. These good people did not fail to remark the traces of tears upon her face as soon as she arrived at their house, and her swollen eyes became the subject of many pieces of pleasantry.


“Have you been quarrelling with your sweetheart, my love?” asked the farmer’s wife.

“Never you mind, my pretty dear,” responded her spouse; “he’ll soon be glad to make it up again. Young men are not in a hurry to run away from such a face as yours.”

Meanwhile Moreton and Turville were driving towards the latter’s house. There were a few moments of embarrassed silence, which Turville was the first to break.

“You are cleverer than I took you to be, Moreton,” he said, “at least if that blooming fair one is, as I suppose, the original of your picture.”

“What do you mean?” replied his friend.




“Why, to think of your making your lovely St. Elizabeth out of a girl like that! She is very good-looking, I don’t deny, and her colouring is first-rate—such fine eyes and hair! But she has got some ugly freckles, and her feet and hands leave much to be desired, as the French would express it. Nothing could ever make her look like a lady; those gaudy clothes just suit her, by the bye, and you have actually turned her into a personage of distinction, and given her the expression of a saint instead of a—sinner let us say. Those models are all alike; it would not do if they were very prim and proper, as you artists know.”

Moreton reddened, and bit his moustache.

“Don’t expect me to return your compliments, Turville,” he said angrily. “Your usual penetration has deserted you to-day. Miss Brailsford is not what you take her for; she is a very good girl, and I am very fond of her,” he wound up fiercely.

“Sits the wind in that quarter?” said Turville to himself. “I must take care not to offend. You remind me,” he continued aloud, “of a story I read about some painter swell or other in the Middle Ages, whose best pictures were half of them painted for him by angels in the night, when he was asleep, and I am sure that Cupid has done a similar kind office for you. But here we are,” he concluded, as the dog-cart turned in at the lodge-gates of Brenley Hall.



The two friends at once joined the ladies of the family, who were drinking tea out on the lawn, and Perceval's visit passed very pleasantly, though nothing that was said or done by any of the party deserves a special record here, or would serve, if chronicled, to help forward the course of this little story. But when Moreton had taken leave of all the rest, his host said he had just remembered that he particularly wanted him to see a new hunter, and proposed they should go round to the stables.

As soon as they got into the shrubbery, Turville said—

“ Now, Moreton, we are very old friends, and you must promise not to be offended with me, but I can't help thinking about

you and that girl. Of course I know you met her by chance, and were only giving her a lift on her way to her own friends, but when a man in your position is seen driving about the country with a showy-looking girl, whom it is out of the question he should marry, people may be pardoned for jumping to the conclusion that it is a case of driving—to the devil. It is a thoroughly false position for you both, and if you can take care of yourself you ought to think of the young woman, and be careful how you compromise her.”

“I call this much ado about nothing,” replied Perceval, trying to laugh the matter off.

But Turville’s quick eye had seen him wince ever so slightly when the impossi-

bility of his marrying the fair companion of his drive was alluded to, and he determined not to let the matter drop, though it cost him a visible effort to begin again.

“I am a great deal older than you, Moreton; I have been married seven years,” he said after a pause, sighing deeply, “and I think you ought to listen to me. Marriage should be a relation of equality, as far as social position goes; I feel this more and more every day I live. Well, I suppose we should most of us do differently if we could have our time over again, and marrying beneath one is worse, everybody knows, than marrying above one. It is all nonsense for a man to talk of raising his wife to his own level; that sort of thing is sooner said than done; and if he

takes a false step of this kind he can only spend the rest of his life in repenting of it. I must not keep you any longer though, pacing up and down. Good-bye, old fellow, and remember my little sermon. *Verbum sap.*"

"God bless you, Turville!" said Moreton, wringing his friend's hand with unusual warmth, for he really felt grateful to him, knowing that he spoke from bitter experience, since it was no secret that the stream of the Turvilles' married life was not seldom—

Roughened by those cataracts and breaks
Which humour interposed too often makes.

Reginald Turville had been notorious as a tuft-hunter when at Oxford, where he had the felicity to make the acquaintance

of the Earl of Belmont, and his friends used to say he could hardly open his mouth without mentioning his good fortune in this respect. So it was only natural they should indulge in a little secret satisfaction when Nemesis soon after overtook him in the shape of Lady Mary Corbye, sister to the said Earl, a lady whose temper was as short as her pedigree was long, and who, unfortunately for Turville, formed and carried out the condescending resolve of honouring him with her hand.





CHAPTER VIII.

SUNSET AND SUNRISE.

"Alas ! the sun is set," she cried—

"That story's oft been told ;

Look round, and on the other side

It rises as of old."

HEINE.

MORETON heartily wished he had never promised to call for Lucy, and he drove slowly in order to make sure of not having to wait when he should reach the top of the lane. He was annoyed and out of spirits ; the wind, too, had shifted, and blew in his face, covering him with dust, and adding physical to mental discomfort. Lucy was nowhere to be seen, however, when he arrived at the appointed

spot, and he, as a matter of course, wished yet more fervently he had allowed her to get home after her own fashion. But he had made a promise, and felt bound to fulfil it, so after waiting a short time in vain, he gave the dog-cart in charge to a man who happened to be passing, and began to walk down the lane.

As he drew nearer and nearer to the farm, shouts of plebeian laughter, roars of vulgar mirth, broke more and more distinctly on his ear, until at last, in the field next to the house, he espied a party of young people engaged in the refined and elegant pastime called “kiss-in-the-ring.”

“Can Lucy be here?” he reflected, horror-struck, yet determined to look a

little further before allowing himself to be seen.

The hawthorn hedge was both high and thick, and was exchanged, where the field ended and the garden began, for one formed of laurel bushes, so that when Moreton had proceeded a few yards he was enabled, still unobserved, to contemplate another group which was gathered around a table placed in the centre of the small grass plot in front of the house. The members of it were busy eating and drinking, talking and laughing; the clatter of knives and forks, the peals of merriment, the harsh, unmusical voices, made up a deafening clamour. At the jolly farmer's right hand sat Lucy, bareheaded, for, heated with romping, she had taken off her

hat and hung it on a rose-bush. Her face was flushed, her hair was rough; she was engaged in consuming, not perhaps in the daintiest possible manner, the substantial viands upon her plate. Ever and anon she paused to utter a little scream, and exclaim, "Oh, my! I say, Mr. Smith!" as an acknowledgment of the various harmless jokes played off on her by her facetious host, greatly to the amusement of a young shopman who sat on her other side. When she asked for sugar, salt was sprinkled over her strawberries; when she looked round for a moment, a spoon, heated in the boiling tea, was suddenly brought upon her hand, and so forth.

It may be imagined with what feelings Perceval beheld the scene, and how he

mentally contrasted this tea table with the one he had so lately left under the spreading cedar on the smooth lawn at Brenley Hall. He remembered the delicate china, the shining silver, the low murmur of conversation, the musical ripple of well-bred laughter, Lady Mary's piquant vivacity, her husband's genial cordiality. Those were *his* friends, and *these*—these were the friends of the girl he thought of making his wife.

Why are you so shocked, O! poor Prince Perceval? Is it such a dreadful thing to see your fairy princess in her native element?

Moreton opened the garden gate and advanced towards the party, upon whom a solemn hush fell instantaneously, dead

silence replacing, at the sight of him, the noisy hum of a few minutes before. He walked straight up to the hostess, and unceremoniously addressed her.

“Mrs. Smith,” he began, “I promised to drive Miss Brailsford home to Selwood, and so I have come for her—too early, I fear,” he concluded, glancing towards Lucy, who looked as sheepish as the rest, while Moreton devoutly hoped she would say she did not want to leave yet, and preferred walking back. Mrs. Smith cut off this retreat.

“Then you had better be going, Lucy, my dear,” she replied promptly. “We shall have some rain before long, and an offer from a gentleman is not to be refused.”

She spoke in all innocence, good woman,

unconscious of any latent meaning her words could have, but a titter, inexpressibly irritating to Moreton, ran round the group as she concluded.

Lucy got up from the table, and the young shopman not only fetched her hat, but persisted in putting it on for her, and in walking back with her to where the dog-cart was waiting. Perceval, escorted by Mr. and Mrs. Smith, went on in front, and could not help overhearing the remarks of Lucy's companion.

"Now I see why you've given me the cold shoulder all this evening, Miss," he said; "you'll not be quite so stiff with this fine gentleman, I daresay."

At last the top of the lane was reached, and Lucy seated in the dog-cart.

“ Here’s a duck for Mr. Oldham’s dinner to-morrow,” began Mrs. Smith, handing up a mysterious parcel wrapped in a linen cloth. “ Mind you cook it nicely for him ; he’s partial to roast duck, I know. I’ve put the herbs for the stuffing all ready, and be careful that the onion ”—

But the elaborate directions she was about to give were cut short by her husband.

“ You’re a little duck yourself, that you are,” he said to Lucy. “ Ain’t she now, Mr. Moreton ? ” he went on, winding up with a loud chuckle at his own wit.

The shopman’s valedictory salute was widely different from the obsequious bow with which he was wont to put parcels into the carriage when the ladies from Moreton


Park chanced to shop at his master's establishment in Fairport.

Perceval had had enough of it. He took the whip and touched Black Bess, causing that thoroughbred animal to start off at a pace which terrified Lucy, and made her cling helplessly to the back of the dog-cart. The rain began to fall heavily, and the drive was a miserable one in every way ; neither of the two felt inclined to talk, and it is doubtful which was most relieved and thankful when Selwood Castle was reached at last.

Oldham, at work in his garden, had felt the chilling wind, and been driven indoors by the rain, which added a new source of disquietude to the other and more serious anxieties tormenting him, and completed

his sense of misery and depression. When at last he heard Lucy's step on the gravel outside, and her hand on the lock of the door, he tried to rouse himself, and strove to receive her cheerfully; but one glance sufficed to tell him that her mood was very different from what he fancied it would be, for he saw that she looked as wretched as he felt.

"I have spoilt my new hat," she said, "and my white feather is ruined too. See how wet and draggled it is! Everything has turned out badly to-day; I have not enjoyed myself one bit, and I am cold, and so tired," she continued, half crying, as she brought a stool to Oldham's side and sat down at his feet, as she used to do when a child. Then, following in this also




the habit of her childish days, she told him all her tale of vexation and disappointment; how Mr. Moreton had overtaken her, and offered to drive her to the Smiths'; how his friend had come up, and turned her little triumph into bitter mortification; how she had been made ashamed of her friends, and Mr. Moreton had been ashamed of her.

"I never want to go anywhere with him again," she wound up; "I feel as if I would rather never see him again. I wish he had never come here at all, that I do! I should like to go quite away for a time. Mrs. Smith asked me yesterday to stay a few weeks with them, and help Polly make her wedding clothes; she is to be married at Michaelmas you know. Do spare me,

Uncle Robert, please do ; the change would do me so much good."

Lucy was crying bitterly by this time, and when at last she looked up, she saw to her astonishment that there were tears in Oldham's eyes. But she little guessed the alternatives of feeling with which he had listened to her tale, nor the intense thankfulness and unbounded relief with which he had heard its conclusion. She thought his emotion was due to sympathy alone.

"Oh, how kind you are!" she broke out impetuously. "How glad I am to get back to you! I wish I had never vexed you by going to Moreton Park, but I mean to stay with you always now, indeed I do!"



“ God grant you may ! ” ejaculated Oldham, with a fervour which seemed to Lucy exaggerated and misplaced, until a fortnight when he came to see her at Farmer Smith’s, and told her the secret he had hitherto guarded so carefully. Prominent among the feelings with which she listened to him was wonder that he could have kept such a secret from her for so long.

It was as if the spirit of hopeless yearning, of sombre melancholy and vain regret, which tormented Robert Oldham all through that summer afternoon, had spread its dusky-hued wings at nightfall, and flown across the channel while people were asleep. Most certainly it was hovering over the head of Beatrice Sarmiento the next morning, as she sat in the balcony

of her room at the Schweitzerhof Hotel at Lucerne, with a popular German novel lying unheeded in her lap. The expression of her face was strangely out of keeping with the bright scene around her; the luxuriant oleanders, covered with rosy, perfumed blossoms, under whose shade she was sitting; the blue lake at her feet, glistening like a sheet of silver in the summer sunshine; the lofty mountains to the right, the cheerful, busy quay to the left, with its perpetual movement and bustle of coming and going. Could any one fail to admire all this varied charm and many-sided loveliness? Yet she sat there unmoved, gazing on the blue mountains in the distance with dim eyes and heavy heart, like some strangely jarring discord,

some note painfully out of tune in the midst of a majestic harmony.

“How I envy those men and women hard at work on the shore of the lake,” she thought, as the shouts of the toiling throng roused her at last from her reverie. “They have no time to think about anything but their daily labour; they do not know the weary misery of vain regret! If only I had some constant and compulsory occupation, I could bear my unhappiness so much better; but I have nothing to do except to enjoy myself, and a hard and impossible task it is.”

At this moment Mrs. Moreton came on to the balcony.

“I have been looking for you everywhere, Beatrice,” she said, in a joyful,

eager voice; "this telegram has just come for me from Perceval. Only think, he leaves England to-night, and will be here in a day or two. I begin to hope everything will turn out right after all, everything," she added, laying a peculiar stress upon the last word, and throwing her arms affectionately round Beatrice, whom she kissed again and again.

The girl submitted patiently to the caresses, which she only half returned, and then took up her novel with a little gesture of impatience, as if unwilling to be disturbed in the perusal of a book of which she had not read a dozen lines that morning. But she only wanted to be rid of Mrs. Moreton, and be left to herself once more.

She did not possess the elder lady's

elastic nature and sanguine temperament. Hope within her was both dead and buried, and could not be brought to life, much less raised from the grave, by the few commonplace words of an ordinary telegram.

“Beatrice is such a very odd girl,” Mrs. Moreton remarked later in the day to her old friend Lady de Bracy, as they sat together in the garden; “she scarcely seemed even glad to hear of my son’s coming. Really sometimes I think she has no feeling after all.”

“Quiet, reserved people do so often get called unfeeling in a most unfair way,” answered Lady de Bracy, who had joined Mrs. Moreton and Beatrice at Geneva, and was now spending a few days with them on her way to Northern Italy.

Beatrice was a great favourite of hers, and she could not bear to hear anything that sounded like blaming her.

“She is so very inconsistent,” resumed Mrs. Moreton; “one never can tell beforehand how she will take anything, and whether she will be pleased or vexed.”

“My dear Mrs. Moreton,” Lady de Bracy replied, “don’t you think we are all a little apt to term people inconsistent whose characters we cannot understand? Many things puzzle us in this world only because we have not succeeded in obtaining *le mot de l’énigme*, and I cannot help fancying this is the reason why you cannot make Miss Sarmiento’s conduct out.”

“She has a warm partisan in you at all times,” said Mrs. Moreton with a smile,

“and I daresay you are right. But if I am justified in my hopes, and the anticipations which my son’s message has raised do not deceive me, I still cannot help asking myself with some anxiety whether Beatrice is a sufficiently skilful player to catch the ball in its rebound.”





CONCLUSION.

SEVERAL summers have come and gone since that day, but the scene with which my story opens is still enacted, nor do the chief performers appear ever to grow weary of their parts. To those who live in large cities, or who move about frequently from place to place, at home or abroad, it is marvellous to see how little change the passing years seem to bring to the dwellers in remote country districts. Week by week Lucy takes a wreath of flowers with her to church, in order to lay it on her mother's grave, just as she did years ago; nor does Robert forget his first love, although he is so very happy with his last that he has grown to look brighter



and younger, and less like Lucy's father since he has been her husband. But strangers still ask, just as I did, what the relationship between them is, and are told in reply the history I have been endeavouring to narrate. Whether or not Beatrice ever knew all that went on between Perceval and Lucy, especially while she herself was away in Switzerland, she has, at any rate, far too much tact to question him on the subject, and the gratitude he feels to his wife for her prudent reticence makes him, if possible, more thankful than ever that he did not commit the grievous mistake of marrying his first love instead of his last.

THE END.

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